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“A rich and deeply satisfying theological treat!”

—Sinclair Ferguson

By Faith, Not by Sight



PAUL AND THE
ORDER OF SALVATION

RICHARD B. GAFFIN JR.

“Dr. Gaffin’s hallmark is his enviable combination of careful and profound exegesis with faith-filled, joy-inducing biblical theology. The result brings illumination to the mind and a deep satisfaction to the heart. *By Faith, Not by Sight* will in equal measure thrill the student grappling with Pauline theology and nourish and shape the work of the minister preaching from Paul’s letters. A rich and deeply satisfying theological treat!”

—**Sinclair Ferguson**, Professor of Systematic Theology, Redeemer Theological Seminary, Dallas

“Having recommended this book since its initial release for its accessible and comprehensive—yet mercifully brief—overview of an undeniably important and central biblical concern, I’m delighted to see it is now available again. Readers should settle in and prepare for a rich feast. They will not be disappointed.”

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—**Charles E. Hill**, Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

“Richard Gaffin applies discerning exegetical observation and carefully nuanced theological insight to the significant and much controverted issues of union with Christ, justification, sanctification, faith, works, and their various relationships in Pauline soteriology. This study brings clarity and precision to recent discussions concerning the content of the divinely revealed gospel proclaimed by the apostle Paul.”

—**Dennis E. Johnson**, Professor of Practical Theology, Westminster Seminary California

“Professor Gaffin has devoted the major part of his career to the study and elucidation of Pauline theology. In this latest contribution, with admirable brevity, he articulates his interpretation in its most mature and clearest form, unpacking the very structure of Paul’s thought against the background of

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—**Moisés Silva**, Formerly Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

“Dr. Gaffin’s *By Faith, Not by Sight* assesses the problems of the so-called New Perspective on Paul (NPP) and offers an exegetically grounded and confessionally Reformed solution to those problems, a solution that will likely remain unmatched for its clarity and penetration of the issues.”

—**Lane Tipton**, Charles Krahe Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia

“Rather than playing off *historia salutis*, the historical accomplishment of redemption through the person and work of Christ, against *ordo salutis*, the application of redemption to believers by the Spirit of Christ, Gaffin grounds the latter in the former. In so doing, he confirms the fundamental importance of union with Christ to the believer’s simultaneous participation in all the saving benefits of Christ’s saving work.”

—**Cornelis Venema**, President, Mid-America Reformed Seminary

“The gospel, union with Christ, justification by faith alone, and sanctification have occupied center stage in recent evangelical discussion. I am therefore especially grateful for Dr. Gaffin’s masterful and penetrating survey of Paul’s teaching on the application of redemption. . . . Should be in the hands of every minister of the Word and student of Scripture.”

—**Guy Prentiss Waters**, Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson

“How, in the apostle Paul’s writings, does the individual receive salvation? The answer to that question must be articulated anew in every generation. This book attempts a fresh conceptualization flowing from careful exegesis, the history of interpretation, Reformed and other confessions, and challenges to historic Christian understanding arising from (but not limited to) the New Perspective. . . . Gaffin succeeds in presenting a compelling synthetic portrait of central features of Paul’s—and God’s—saving gospel message.”

—**Robert W. Yarbrough**, Professor of New Testament, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis

By Faith, Not by Sight

PAUL AND THE ORDER OF SALVATION

Second Edition

RICHARD B. GAFFIN JR.



P U B L I S H I N G

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Foreword

IT IS A UNIQUE PRIVILEGE and a remarkable providence to write a foreword for a book that has been so deeply influential in my own theological thinking. Some time ago I suggested to a group of ministers that we read “*By Faith, Not by Sight*” (Paternoster, 2006), by Richard Gaffin. When I subsequently learned that this important volume had already gone out of print, I was disappointed. But when Professor Gaffin asked me to write a foreword for its reprinting by P&R Publishing, I was deeply honored—but also a little surprised. After all, what could I possibly say that is not already said better in this book? Coupled with the fact that the Reformed world is already filled with enough sycophants—please excuse the previous sentence!—this leaves me in a difficult position in writing a suitable foreword to this work.

As I read this book for the first time, it occurred to me that extensive references to early modern Reformed divines (*ca.* 1500–1800) were absent. This is not a criticism, of course, but simply an observation. Yet the theology expressed in the book is very much in line with the best Reformed thinkers of that period. Thus, a historical-theological perspective may fit nicely with what one finds in this book—a work that highlights Professor Gaffin’s abilities as an exegete and a biblical theologian. Systematic theology should generally try to incorporate careful exegesis and biblical theology, so I am happy to provide some historical background, especially when some have questioned Professor Gaffin’s theology in relation to the early modern period.

The Reformed tradition has always had its opponents, whether those who are sometimes in error (e.g., the Lutherans)

or those who are fully heretical (e.g., the Socinians). But our tradition has also had its own intra-Reformed controversies due to the fact that otherwise impeccable Reformed theologians have held views that, for example, sometimes have more in common with Lutheran or antinomian theology. This book deals with a number of the more sensitive theological issues that have arisen over the centuries, such as the order of salvation, and it seems apposite to identify where Professor Gaffin's views fall on these matters.

Reformed debates concerning the proper relation between union with Christ, faith, and justification are hundreds of years old. In the seventeenth century, for example, the highly regarded New England divine, John Cotton—who, as Hunter Powell's research shows, was hugely influential on the thinking of many of the Westminster divines—was at the center of these debates. The controversy was, like many intra-Reformed disputes, quite complex due to the Aristotelian-like categories used by theologians to explain causality in a full-orbed manner (e.g., principal, efficient, instrumental, material, formal, and final causes of salvation).

Regarding faith, a much-used distinction of the Reformed scholastic period concerned the difference between the act (*actus*) and the habit (*habitus*) of faith. The habit of faith gives the sinner the ability/potency that enables the act of faith to take place. The typical Reformed view is that actual faith justifies, but that habitual faith does not (*fides actualis justificat, non habitualis*). Cotton denied this premise, and by doing so he self-consciously held to views that were not typical of the mainstream of Reformed thought in his day. For Cotton, the habit of faith is the formal cause of justification, which precedes the act of faith. He was pressed on this view at a synod in New England, because his position that faith followed justification was not the typical Reformed view, but rather was associated with antinomianism. Almost all Reformed theologians held that faith precedes imputation. Faith enables the believer to be “mutually united”

to Christ, resulting in what was sometimes called “ultimate union.” Because of this, God imputes Christ’s righteousness to the believing sinner. Both union and justification are contingent upon the act of faith. That is why Thomas Goodwin remarked that all of God’s justifying acts depend on union with Christ. It also explains why, by and large, most Reformed theologians argued that faith was the antecedent condition for receiving justification. Thus, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believing sinner is mediate (i.e., through faith), not immediate (i.e., before faith). The role of faith in seventeenth-century Reformed dogmatics can hardly be overstated. Christ’s works of impetration (i.e., salvation accomplished) are in a very real sense meaningless apart from his works of application. Against the antinomians, faith marks the transition of a sinner from being in a state of wrath to being in a state of grace. Faith is the means by which a sinner is brought into union with Christ. Any view that posits faith as a consequence of imputation (e.g., that of Cotton) is not the typical Reformed position. Readers will note that Professor Gaffin’s view on the role of faith in the *ordo salutis* is unquestionably orthodox.

Therefore, what Melchior Leydekker said at the beginning of the eighteenth century, “Op de roeping, waar door het geloof en de vereeniging met Christus Jesus gegeven word / volgd de rechtveerdigmakinge” (“After calling, through which faith and union with Jesus Christ is given, follows justification”), could very well come from the pen of Professor Gaffin. Equally, Owen’s contention that union with Christ is the cause of all other graces (e.g., justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification) could also be affirmed by Professor Gaffin. In short, Reformed theologians have almost unanimously held that union with Christ is the ground of both justification and sanctification, and that Christ is the meritorious cause of both. But at the same time, union with Christ is not simply something that takes place only when faith is exercised. As our tradition has made perfectly clear,

union with Christ is immanent, transient, and applicatory. In present-day Reformed parlance—which we also find articulated clearly in this book—we refer to these three stages as predestinarian, redemptive-historical, and mystical. The terms used in each era are different, but the concept remains the same. Each stage is contingent upon the previous stage, so that the ultimate goal of redemption planned and redemption accomplished is redemption applied.

Since the goal of redemption is union with the risen Lord, there seems little doubt that, if Paul has a center to his order of salvation, it is this doctrine. When other applied blessings, such as justification or sanctification, are made central, there are inevitably deleterious consequences for the Christian life, whereby incipient forms of antinomianism and legalism creep in. For example, a certain Lutheran view that justification precedes sanctification, so that it causes union with Christ and sanctification, ends up attributing to justification a renovative/transformational element. The notion that one applied benefit can cause another applied benefit has always perplexed me. But when union with Christ structures the whole of applied redemption, the aforementioned errors are dealt with better. This has to do with the fact that Christ's person, not simply his work or his applied benefits, must have the preeminence. Indeed, the gift of Christ's person is a greater gift to us than his benefits. As many of our finest divines have vigorously argued, there exists a priority of Christ's person over his work. Union with Christ helps us to keep this salient fact in mind. We are not simply recipients of his benefits; we also belong to him.

A second area of interest in present-day polemics regarding justification concerns the role of works at the final judgment. Balancing the doctrine of justification by faith alone with the teaching of Scripture that Christians will be judged "according to their works" remains a difficult task. Some imagine that the classical Reformed position on Romans 2:5–16 has in view only

a hypothetical possibility, which in actual fact cannot be true of any sinner, whether redeemed or not. But many Reformed theologians did not adopt the hypothetical view of this disputed passage (though vv. 5–11 and 12–16 were sometimes distinguished), such as Martin Bucer, John Ball, Thomas Manton, Herman Witsius, Wilhelmus à Brakel, and Petrus van Mastricht. For example, Mastricht put forth the view that there are three stages of justification that should be “diligently observed.” These are not different justifications, but distinct stages in the one justification by faith alone. In the first stage, “establishment,” in which man is first justified, the efficacy and presence of works are entirely excluded for acquiring justification. In the second stage, “continuation,” works have no efficacy, but works must be present, as we see in James 2:14–16. In the third stage, “consummation,” in which believers gain possession of eternal life, good works have a certain “efficacy,” insofar as God will not grant possession of eternal life unless they are present. Interestingly, Mastricht adduces Romans 2:7, 10 in support of his view. Like Mastricht, Professor Gaffin also rejects the view that Romans 2:5–16 is hypothetical. For that reason, both authors hold firmly to the Reformed view that good works are a necessary condition (consequent, not antecedent, to faith) for salvation. Spirit-wrought good works are not only *the way of life*, but also *the way to life/salvation* (see WLC 32). Yet the position expounded in this book is perhaps more persuasive than what one finds in Mastricht’s significant work.

This last point allows me to address something else that will help readers to understand the worth of this book. The biblical-theological, redemptive-historical insights pioneered by Geerhardus Vos, Herman Ridderbos, and Richard Gaffin were anticipated in the early Reformed tradition. Some of our best early modern Reformed divines show an acute sensitivity to redemptive-historical concerns. The idea that Christ’s resurrection and justification are also our resurrection and justification is not a recent invention. Indeed, Thomas Goodwin’s remark

that the matter (*materiale*) of justification is the obedience and death of Christ, but that the act of pronouncing us righteous (the *formale* of justification) depends on Christ's resurrection, which then ushers in the new creation, has strong affinities with the strongly redemptive-historical train of thought in this book.

With that in mind, Vos and the others were still pioneers in their field. But John Owen had already argued rather vigorously for the necessity of their approach. According to Owen, because of the way in which God has revealed himself in Scripture (i.e., not in the form of confessional documents), theologians need to be engaged in a process of ongoing exegetical reflection. In every age, there are different battles to be fought, which provide an opportunity for better restatements of the truth, as well as new insights into God's Word. Confessional theologians such as Owen did not merely rest on the truths discovered in the previous eras of ecclesiastical history, but hoped that Reformed theologians would continue the work they began. Indeed, this was due to the fact that error and heresy dress themselves up somewhat differently in each age. And discover new truths they did. The advancements by Vos, Ridderbos, and Gaffin concern the explicit integration and exposition of the role of eschatology in relation to soteriology, especially the recognition of the eschatological structure of the history of revelation culminating in the resurrection of Christ.

The reader of this book will quickly discover that Professor Gaffin deals with various current errors explicitly and implicitly. His irenic approach does not negate his ability to critique those with whom he disagrees. His explicit critique of the New Perspective(s) on Paul joins his implicit critique of a sort of anti-nomianism current in the church today, whereby the gospel (or salvation) is understood—practically, if not theoretically—almost exclusively in terms of justification. His arguments are devastating, not primarily because he confesses the truth as it has been expressed in our confessional history (which he does), but because

his book is filled with rigorous exegesis of Scripture. Moreover, the eschatological focus (i.e., realized eschatology) of several core doctrines, particularly with reference to Christ's death and resurrection, enables Professor Gaffin to wed together nicely the redemptive-historical concerns, understood in terms of the *historia salutis*, and the applied soteriological realities, understood in terms of the *ordo salutis*. With these categories in place, the Christological focus of salvation accomplished and applied is maintained, union with Christ is given its proper significance, and the fullness of Paul's gospel is not reduced to forensic categories. For these reasons, the order of salvation must first be in Christ—he was called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and glorified—before it can be in his people. Moreover, Professor Gaffin carefully insists that justification has a logical and chronological priority to progressive sanctification—but the latter, not less than the former, still belongs to Paul's gospel! Thus, there is much in this book that is not original—and rightly so!—in terms of our Reformed theological heritage. But there is also much in this book that takes old truths and restates them with more clearly delineated categories in the wake of twentieth-century advancements in Pauline studies, as well as with fresh exegetical insights into key passages, such as 1 Corinthians 15:3–4.

With the above points in mind—and I could have made many more—allow me to express the reasons for my delight that this book will be made available again—this time, I hope, to a much wider audience. Here you have some of the most critical theological doctrines crystallized into a book that isn't hundreds of pages long. In this respect, Professor Gaffin is decidedly unlike the Puritans. Of course, each sentence is packed, and most readers will need to read this book a few times to understand his mind—and, I would say, more importantly, the mind of Paul. But your effort will be rewarded. You have the very best Reformed theology in front of you—Reformed theology that is neither Lutheran, nor antinomian, nor of the

FOREWORD

New Perspective(s) on Paul. Instead, Professor Gaffin presents to us Reformed theology strengthened over time by clear theological categories and pain-staking exegesis of the Scriptures. I, for one, am glad that everything I have learned from my study of post-Reformation Reformed theologians has been vindicated by this penetrating and exegetically rigorous monograph on Paul and the order of salvation.

MARK JONES, VANCOUVER

Preface to the First Edition

THIS BOOK BEGAN as four lectures given for the annual School of Theology of Oak Hill Theological College, London, in May 2004, later expanded to five lectures given at the Seventh Annual Pastors Conference, sponsored by the session of the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, Monroe, Louisiana, in January 2005. I take the opportunity here to express publicly my thanks for the warm hospitality I enjoyed on both occasions.

These lectures are presented here in four chapters, structured somewhat differently than when they were given, with a brief Epilogue added. Otherwise, I have kept to their scope and content, expanding for the most part only slightly at a number of places. This is in keeping with the purpose of the lectures, to highlight matters which, it seem to me, pastors and other teachers in the church and more generally interested students of the Bible need to be clear on and continue to think about as they concern themselves with Paul's theology. I hope my "academic peers" will find some value in what I have written, but they are not my primary audience.

Given this purpose, I have had to content myself at a number of places with having to assert rather than argue, with affirming instead of developing, at least in any extensive fashion. I am well aware that a much bigger book could be, and needs to be, written on the matters I have addressed. I ask the reader to keep in mind my primary concern with providing an overall perspective, without elaborating extensively, on a set of issues central in the teaching of Paul. That purpose accounts as well for what may

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

strike some as the unevenness of the footnotes provided, which I have tried to keep to a minimum. The translations of biblical passages cited are my own, unless otherwise noted.

I deeply appreciate the invitation of Dr. David Peterson, Principal of Oak Hill College, to give these lectures and the attendant arrangement with Paternoster for their publication. The time spent with him and his colleagues, though brief, was one I continue to prize.

RICHARD B. GAFFIN JR.
WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
MARCH 2006

Preface to the Second Edition

MY PLAN AT ONE POINT for a substantial expansion of the first edition has not materialized. With the continuing press of other commitments, I have had to forego doing that in order to avoid an even longer delay in republication.

The revisions in this edition are not extensive, though occasionally they are substantive. In a number of places I have rewritten to be as clear as I can, particularly in light of criticisms of the first edition. At several points I have addressed specific criticisms. A few footnotes have been added, as well as a Scripture index and an author/subject index.

My thanks to the publisher for undertaking this second edition, to Amanda Martin for her ready and efficient assistance, to James Scott for his careful reading of the manuscript and for proposing numerous improvements, to Dustyn Eudaly for his painstaking care in preparing the indices, and to Mark Jones for enhancing this volume with his foreword.

RICHARD B. GAFFIN JR.
SEPTEMBER 2013



The Order of Salvation and the Theology of Paul

The Study of Paul Today

As many—perhaps most—readers will have at least some awareness, the study of Paul continues to be dominated by the so-called New Perspective on Paul, the substantial reassessment of Paul’s theology that has emerged over the past several decades. Generalizations about this New Perspective need to be made with some caution. They are notoriously difficult, since the designation covers a spectrum of viewpoints that often diverge, sometimes even widely. Yet, if the label is at all meaningful, then some common concerns and convictions must be identifiable.¹

Without attempting any kind of complete and documented description here, it seems fair to observe that what, as much as

1. The literature by this time is legion. For general surveys, see esp. G. Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), and S. Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). Both these volumes, while on the whole fair in their depictions, are also substantially critical of the New Perspective. For a favorably disposed summary, see D. Garlington, *In Defense of the New Perspective on Paul: Essays and Reviews* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 1–28 (“The New Perspective on Paul: Two Decades On”), and the personally orientated account of J. D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul: Collected Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 1–88 (“The New Perspective on Paul: Whence, What, Whither?”).

anything, makes the New Perspective that, a new perspective, is a spectrum of reassessments of Paul decisively influenced by a reassessment of Second Temple Judaism in its various mainstream forms. In other words, the New Perspective on Paul is, more basically, a new perspective on Judaism in the Second Temple period; the reassessment of Paul stems from a basic reassessment of the Judaism of his time. It is worth noting here, moreover, that “new” here is relative. For the most part, this reassessment of Judaism, as applied to the study of Paul, is a matter of New Testament scholars arriving at conclusions about Second Temple Judaism and even about Paul that had already been reached by students of Judaism earlier in the twentieth century, notably by G. F. Moore and G. W. Montefiore. This primarily Protestant appropriation began approximately in the last quarter of the last century with the influential work of Krister Stendahl and E. P. Sanders, soon to be followed by others, notably James Dunn, who coined the expression “the New Perspective,”² and N. T. Wright.

A further fair generalization, particularly important for the concerns of this book, is the difference between the New Perspective, on the one hand, and the Reformation and subsequent confessional Protestantism, on the other, in their respective assessments of Pauline teaching—teaching that the Reformation tradition holds to be central for salvation. This difference especially relates to Paul’s teaching on justification. New Perspective estimates of this difference vary, and its extent is a matter of ongoing debate. But a difference between the Reformation and New Perspective appraisals of Paul does exist. It is bound up with the New Perspective view that when Saul the Pharisee became Paul the Christian he did not, as the Reformation tradition holds, abandon a religion of personal salvation by works for one of salvation by grace through faith. Rather, he exchanged one understanding and experience of divine grace for another.

2. J. D. G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 65 (1983): 95–122.

He repudiated a narrow, Jewish-centered view of God's electing grace for a broader, universal understanding, one that embraces not just Israel but all nations. One might say, on this view, that Paul, in becoming a Christian, went "from grace to grace."

Notably, the New Perspective sees Paul's teaching on justification by faith as reflecting concerns that are primarily (or even exclusively, for some of its proponents) corporate and ecclesiological, focused on the equal standing of Jewish and Gentile believers and how they are to relate to each other, rather than, as the Reformation holds, as critically constitutive for the salvation of individual sinners. In this way, the New Perspective decenters justification in Paul, not by questioning that it has an important place in his teaching, but by denying that it is central in his *soteriology*, especially as the Reformation tradition understands it to be central.

A basic consequence of these developments, particularly of this decentering of justification, as understood by the Reformation, is that the issue of the salvation of the individual has tended to become eclipsed or viewed as one about which Paul has relatively little concern or even interest. N. T. Wright, for instance, states that " 'the gospel' is not, for Paul, a message about 'how one gets saved,' in an individual and ahistorical sense." The gospel "is not, then, a system of how people get saved." The gospel, as Paul understands it, does not include what "in older theology would be called an *ordo salutis*, an order of salvation."³ Justification is spoken of in a similar vein. "It cannot, that is, be made into an abstract or timeless system, a method of salvation randomly applied." Romans is "not . . . a detached statement of how people get saved, how they enter a relationship with God as individuals."⁴

3. N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 40–41, 45, 60; cf. 32.

4. *Ibid.*, 118, 131; cf. 129. I leave to the side here the question whether the pejorative use of "ahistorical," "timeless," "abstract," "detached," and "randomly

The New Perspective is preoccupied with broad, corporate, salvation-historical, covenantal, Israel-and-the-nations concerns. Properly so. Such concerns, as our own discussion will show, are undeniably not only present but prominent in Paul. But the New Perspective assesses them in a way that his teaching on matters related to individual salvation from sin is left aside as relatively unimportant and uncertain—or even dismissed as peripheral. If, for Paul, neither the gospel nor justification is directly concerned with the salvation of individuals, then it is at best unclear where Paul elsewhere addresses that concern and how he does it. Wright, for instance, says he is “perfectly comfortable with what people normally *mean* when they say ‘the gospel.’ I just don’t think it is what Paul means.”⁵ Perhaps I have missed it, but it is not at all clear to me on what Pauline or other biblical basis he would support that normal meaning.

This state of affairs, as much as any other consideration, has prompted this book. In view of reservations and denials that have accompanied the emergence of the New Perspective and are resulting in a diminished interest in the question of the *ordo salutis* in Paul, it seems appropriate to test these reservations and denials by examining his theology, especially his soteriology, in terms of this question and the issues it raises. The controlling question I want to address throughout concerns Paul’s understanding of how the individual receives salvation. Is that an appropriate or even meaningful question? If so, what place does Paul have for such reception? What does the application of salvation to sinners involve for him? Does he distinguish between salvation accomplished (*historia salutis*) and salvation

applied” in the statements quoted in this paragraph unfairly caricature the Reformation and evangelical tradition that is primarily within their purview. In my view, they do caricature, at least when the best and most important representatives of that tradition are considered.

5. Ibid., 41 (italics original).

applied (*ordo salutis*), and, if so, how important is the latter for him? What is the place of justification in his theology? Is it basic in his soteriology? These and related questions will occupy us.

While such questions are prompted by the development of the New Perspective on Paul, in addressing them here my primary concern is not to evaluate the New Perspective or interact in detail with particular views of its advocates. Rather, the New Perspective will remain in the background, coming into view only as it facilitates and to a certain extent situates my positive presentation of aspects of Paul's theology, primarily in his soteriology.

Regarding that positive presentation, it may be helpful to state at the outset that I see myself as working within the Reformation understanding of Paul and his soteriology, more particularly the understanding of Calvin and Reformed confessional orthodoxy, as I build on the biblical-theological work that has emerged within that tradition, particularly that of Herman Ridderbos and, before him, Geerhardus Vos, who have drawn attention to the controlling place of the redemptive-historical or covenant-historical dimension of his theology.⁶

Paul as Theologian—Some Foundations

Before we begin addressing the order or application of salvation in Paul, we will do well to spend some time on matters of a more general sort—matters that, it seems to me, pastors and other teachers in the church and, more broadly, other interested students of the Bible need to be clear about as they concern themselves with Paul's teaching, or "theology." While useful in its own right, this will serve to make explicit some of the controlling assumptions at work in this book as a whole. For the most part,

6. The major works of G. Vos and H. Ridderbos on Paul are, respectively, *The Pauline Eschatology* (1930; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), and *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. J. R. de Witt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

I will have to assert and affirm, rather than argue or develop, at least in any full fashion.

Biblical Theology and Redemptive-Historical Interpretation

Paul's teaching, especially any of its major themes, involves so-called biblical theology. Since there are widely differing, even contradictory, views of what such a biblical-theological enterprise entails, I should make my own understanding clear. Doing so will also reveal some of my basic commitments on matters of method.⁷

Biblical theology gives attention to the distinctive contribution of each of the biblical writers within his immediate historical circumstances or situatedness. That involves taking into account the fully "occasional" character of their writings, that is, the concrete concerns and specific problems of the original addressees. For reasons we will note presently, such an approach is especially called for in the case of Paul.

A biblical-theological approach, however, must recognize that each writer is part of a much larger scenario, a much larger *historical* scenario. Each with his distinctive contribution functions in the unfolding history of God's self-revelation. God's verbal self-revelation has its rationale as it is tethered to, and is a part within, the larger flow of the overall history of redemption. It functions as accompanying revelatory word, we may fairly generalize, to attest and interpret redemptive deed. In view here, globally considered, is the history that begins with the entrance of human sin into the original creation, which God saw was "very good" (Gen. 1:31), and then moves forward, largely incorporating along the way the history of Israel, God's chosen

7. My comments in the rest of this section follow esp. along the lines of the classic, still important treatment of G. Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), Preface, 11-27 ("Introduction: The Nature and Method of Biblical Theology").

covenant people, until it reaches its culmination, its omega point, in the person and saving work of Jesus Christ, God's final and supreme self-revelation.

The generalizations made in the preceding paragraph are in need of two important qualifications. First, particularly with an eye to special, or verbal, revelation, the terms "covenant history" and "covenant-historical" are more accurate than "redemptive history" and "redemptive-historical." While special revelation for the most part is redemptive, coming after the fall, pre-fall, preredemptive special revelation should not be overlooked or denied as an *integral* aspect of the covenantal communion, the bond of fellowship, that existed between God and his image-bearing creatures before the fall. Natural, or general, revelation (including "natural law") was never meant to function independently, apart from special revelation, whether before or after the fall.⁸

Second, it is fair to say, as a generalization, that verbal revelation is invariably focused on God's activity in history as Creator and Redeemer. It should not be missed, however, that with that historical focus verbal revelation at points refers beyond God's activity in history to his aseity, his self-existence, to his absolute freedom and independence from creation and history. This is beautifully intimated, for instance, in Isaiah 57:15, "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (ESV).

The clearest, most explicit biblical warrant for the fundamental redemptive-historical, history-of-revelation construct in view here is the overarching assertion with which Hebrews begins: "God, having spoken in the past to the fathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, has in these last days spoken to us in his Son" (1:1-2a). This opening statement, umbrella-like, covers the message of Hebrews in its entirety. As

8. On preredemptive special revelation, see esp. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 31-32.

such, it is fairly seen, even more broadly, as providing an overall outlook on the history of redemption and revelation as a whole.

This declaration captures three interrelated aspects of God's "speech," which, I take it, includes deed-revelation as well as word-revelation (that is, verbal revelation in the strict sense). (1) Revelation is expressly in view as a historical process. (2) The diversity involved in this process is accented, particularly for old covenant revelation, revelation through the prophets, by the two adverbs translated "at many times and in various ways," which for emphasis are placed at the beginning of the construction in the original Greek. This diversity, whether or not it is within the author's immediate purview, entails giving commensurate attention to the diverse modes and various literary genres that mark the history of revelation. (3) Christ is the "last days" endpoint of this history, which is nothing less than the eschatological goal of the entire redemptive-revelatory process.⁹

These three points bring us to an all-important observation about the study of Paul. We may say with Geerhardus Vos that Paul is "the greatest constructive mind ever at work on the data of Christianity." Or, as Albert Schweitzer, from a quite contrary perspective, has evocatively put it, Paul is "the patron saint of thought in Christianity."¹⁰ Nonetheless, Paul's theological genius, though unquestionably profound, is not our ultimate interest in considering his teaching. Nor is that interest finally his religious experience, though from every indication it was deep and exemplary. Rather, our deepest concern with him is as he is an apostle—that is, as he is an instrument of God's revelation, authorized by the exalted Christ to attest and interpret the salvation manifested in Christ. Our abiding preoccupation is the

9. For more extensive discussion of redemptive-historical interpretation, see my chapters in S. E. Porter and B. M. Stovell, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 89–110, 174–87.

10. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 149; A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (trans. W. Montgomery; New York: H. Holt, 1931), 377.

revelatory word that comes through Paul, focused on Christ's climactic, redemptive deed.

As we deal with Paul's teaching, then, we should want it to be said of ourselves, above all, what he himself said in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 about the Thessalonian church's response to his preaching, namely that they "accepted it not as the word of men"—though it was manifestly his and bore all the marks of his personality as someone living within the first-century Mediterranean world and having his roots in Second Temple Judaism—"but as what it truly is, the word of God." Ultimately and properly considered, Paul's teaching is God's word. This, I take it, is not just a pious but largely irrelevant patina on our work that may be safely stripped away and effectively ignored as we go about interpreting him. Rather, at stake here is a matter of sober, scientific, methodological, academic necessity for studying Paul—what, as he himself says, is "truly" (*alēthōs*) the case.

That Paul's teaching is God's word is true formally as well as materially—true not just in its content, but also in its oral and written *form*. To deny that the text is God's word, or to allege some factor of discontinuity between the text and God's word, or to find a tension between the text as a linguistic phenomenon, of purely human origin and so questionable and fallible, and a message with an allegedly divine referent dialectically embedded in that text, is to construe Paul in a modern or postmodern way that he would simply find foreign. At least that is so if we are to take 2 Timothy 3:16 and similar passages at face value.¹¹

11. The passive verbal adjective *theopneustos*, "God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16), predicates of the documents that constitute "Scripture" a permanent, enduring quality resulting from their origin, and is best understood as pointing to God as their primary and ultimate author. This conclusion has been firmly established in the works of B. B. Warfield, not to mention others. Efforts made to evade it, such as that made recently by C. D. Allert (*A High View of Scripture?* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 153–56), who cites and attempts to refute Warfield, remain quite unsuccessful; see especially Warfield's *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian

A couple of implications of the word-of-God character of Paul's teaching may be noted here. One important methodological consideration is that, with all due attention being given to his immediate historical context, including relevant extracanonical texts and materials, in interpreting his letters the context that is not only *primary* but *privileged* is the *canonical* context. For any given passage in Paul, the ultimately controlling context is the expanding horizon of contexts provided by the rest of Scripture, beginning with his letters as a whole. This basic hermeneutical stance, it bears stressing, is not bound up with some abstract Scripture principle, as it is wont to be dismissed by some, but is anchored in a consideration already noted, the *redemptive-historical* factor. Paul's letters have their origin, their integral place, and their intended function within the organically unfolding history of revelation, and Scripture as a whole, the canon, with its own production being a part of that history, provides our only normative access to it.

A key part of Paul's theology as God's word is its *essential clarity*. As the Reformation was granted to recognize and confess regarding Scripture as a whole, the assumption, indeed the conviction, throughout this book is that for the church Paul's teaching in its central elements is clear. Just what some of those "central elements" are will occupy us later.

The primary sources for understanding and elaborating Paul's theology I take to be all thirteen of his New Testament letters and also pertinent materials from the latter half of Acts, in particular his speeches and other discourse material recorded there.

The Problem of Interpreting Paul

The essential clarity of Paul's theology must not be affirmed at the expense of ignoring a problem. A couple of rather arrest-

and Reformed, 1948), 245–296 ("The God-Inspired Scripture"), as well as other pertinent chapters in that volume.

ing quotes point up the problem. Albert Schweitzer recounts a remark of Franz Overbeck to Adolf von Harnack, made one day when these two late-nineteenth-century New Testament scholars were together: "No one has ever understood Paul and the only one who did understand him, Marcion, misunderstood him."¹² More recently, Herman Ridderbos has surmised that in Paul's account of his ministry in 2 Corinthians 11:23–26, we have an apt description of the history of the interpretation of Paul: "beaten times without number, often in danger of death . . . shipwrecked three times . . . in danger from my nation, in danger from the Gentiles . . . in danger among false brothers!"¹³

The issue here is not to what extent these and similar statements are warranted. Certainly Overbeck's paradoxically expressed pessimism is not. But such assessments do point up an undeniable state of affairs: the problematic nature of Pauline interpretation down through the history of the church to the present. In fact, the New Testament itself anticipates this state of affairs. This not only points up the antiquity of the problem of interpreting Paul, but also and more importantly puts it in an explicitly canonical perspective.

The reference, of course, is to the generalization made about Paul's letters in 2 Peter 3:16: "In all his [Paul's] letters" (whatever may have been the specific contents of the Pauline corpus circulating at that time) there are "some things that are difficult to understand." These things, Peter goes on to add, bringing out the dark side of the picture as a permanent warning to the church, "the ignorant and unstable twist, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." Notice, by the way, pertinent to our earlier point about Paul's theology being God's word, that this statement is New Testament evidence that already at the time

12. Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 39 n. 1.

13. H. Ridderbos, "Terugblik en uitzicht," in *De dertiende apostel en het elfde gebod: Paulus in de loop der eeuwen*, ed. G. C. Berkouwer and H. A. Oberman (Kampen: Kok, 1971), 190.

2 Peter was written, Paul's letters as a whole were put on a par with the Old Testament and viewed as Scripture.

Peter's assertion of the overall difficulty in understanding Paul's letters prompts us to ask what constitutes that difficulty. Immediately come to mind all the limitations there are on the side of the interpreter, including the ignorance, sometimes sinful, and the sinful perversity we bring to the text in varying degrees. But Peter seems to have in view something distinct from the culpable distortion he mentions, an *inherent* difficulty, a difficulty intrinsic to the text. When we ask about that difficulty, no doubt more than one factor is involved.

For instance, according to 1 Corinthians 2:10, in a context where Paul brings into view considerations basic to his ministry as a whole, he says that the revelation granted to him through the Spirit involves "the deep things of God." The central clarity of Paul's teaching flows out of, as it has its roots in, the impenetrable depths of God's incomprehensibility. For example, the doxology at the end of Romans 11, arresting as it is edifying, is an expression of that incomprehensibility.

To be noted here as well for subsequent generations of the church, like ours, is the difficulty bound up with what at first glance is a much more prosaic factor, the "occasional" nature of his writings already noted. Paul does not provide us with doctrinal treatises, but with letters—genuine letters directed to concrete conditions and problems in specific church situations. A notably pastoral, "practical" concern is always present, even in those sections of Romans where doctrinal reflection is most apparent. On balance, we may say, Paul's letters present, even in their occasional and often doxological character, a unified structure of thought, a coherence of theological thinking.

So a real difficulty in interpreting Paul is that in his writings we encounter a thinker of undeniably reflective and constructive genius with a decidedly doctrinal bent, but only as

he directs himself to specific church situations and problems and in doing so expresses himself in a way that is largely non-formalized theologically, in a nonsystematic or nontopical format. Paul is a theologian who is accessible only through his letters and records of his sermons. Although his letters are not theological treatises, in them we undeniably encounter Paul the theologian.

Another factor compounding the difficulty, especially for us at the historical distance we are, is that some of his letters are written largely against the background of a good deal of previous personal contact and extensive instruction now unknown to us in detail. A good example of this is his teaching on “the man of sin” in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12, where in verse 6 he writes, “Now you know.” What Paul seems to assume as more or less self-evident to his original readers has left subsequent generations of interpreters down to the present thoroughly perplexed and unable to arrive at any real consensus, a state of affairs that prompts from Vos, toward the end of his own lengthy treatment of the passage, the wry comment to the effect that we will have to wait on its fulfillment for its best and definitive exegesis!¹⁴

An analogy I have found useful over the years is to compare Paul’s letters to the visible portion of an iceberg. What projects above the surface is but a small fraction of the total mass, which remains largely submerged, so that what is taken in, particularly at a first glance, may prove deceptive. This point is made less pictorially by the hermeneutical principle expressed in chapter 1, section 6 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, that the teaching of Scripture is not only its express statements but also what follows “by good and necessary consequence.” Particularly in the case of Paul, we are going to make full sense of his letters as a whole, of his theology, only as we are prepared to wrestle with matters of “good and necessary consequence” and with

14. Vos, *Pauline Eschatology*, 133.

the sometimes nettlesome questions that emerge. This state of affairs in large part makes the extensive interpretation of Paul the arduous, even precarious, enterprise to which 2 Peter 3:16 alerts us.

With this factor of difficulty highlighted, an important caveat needs to be made. We must not stress difficulty to the point of losing sight of the more basic clarity to be recognized and affirmed. After all, Peter did not say that “all things” in Paul are “difficult to understand,” but only “some things.”

Paul as a Theologian

All along I have been speaking of Paul’s “theology” and referring to him as a “theologian.” For many, that will not be a problem, but this way of speaking warrants some clarification, since for some it is questionable at best. The perceived danger here is that we will, as it could be put, “drag Paul down to our level.” Viewing Paul as a theologian suggests that he and his theology have at the most only relative authority, that however else we might want to privilege him, his theology has no more authority in principle than any other. This worry is by no means an imaginary one. That is clear from historical-critical approaches to Paul over the past century and a half, particularly as one surveys major works on his theology from F. C. Baur (1845) to James Dunn (1998).¹⁵

What offsets this leveling danger is appreciating Paul’s identity as an apostle, at least if we understand apostleship properly. In accordance with our earlier comments on his teaching being God’s word, we must not lose sight of the formal authoritative significance of his apostolic identity. Careful exegesis, which I omit here, will show that an apostle of Christ is someone uniquely authorized by the exalted Christ to speak authorita-

15. Baur appears to have the distinction of being the first to publish a theology of Paul.

tively for him. Regarding this authority, the apostle is as Christ himself.¹⁶

Paul the theologian, then, is Paul the apostle. That points to the God-breathed origin and authority of his teaching, its character as the word of God. It highlights the radical, categorical difference there is between his theology and post-apostolic theology. His teaching, along with the teaching of the other biblical writers, is Spirit-borne, canonical, and foundational. All subsequent theology, including ours, ought to be Spirit-led (Rom. 8:14), but, unlike Paul's, it is not Spirit-borne (2 Peter 1:21). Ours is noncanonical, no more than derivative of his.

But with that said, the appropriateness and value of approaching Paul as a theologian should not be missed. Again, that value resides in the redemptive-historical factor already noted. With the exception of the situation before the fall, about which we know relatively little since the biblical record concerning it is sparse, all verbal revelation, including Paul's teaching, is a function of the history of redemption and situated at some point in that history. In the case of Paul, like that of the other New Testament writers, redemptive history has reached its climactic endpoint in the death and resurrection of Christ and awaits his return.

Along with the important differences between Paul's theology and ours, there is much that we have in common. In terms of the history of redemption, we share with him and the other New Testament writers a common redemptive-historical *focus* and, further, we do so within a common redemptive-historical *context*. In this regard, 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10 is particularly instructive. There Paul speaks of how that church “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for

16. Out of the vast body of literature on apostolicity in the NT, including apostolic authority, see esp. H. Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures* (trans. H. De Jongste; rev. R. B. Gaffin, Jr.; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988), 1–52.

his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”

Here is a perennial word to the church, good for all times and places until Jesus comes again, one that captures as well as any the basic identity of the church. Christians are those who have renounced, however imperfectly, every idolatry for the service of the living and true God, a service that is bracketed and fundamentally conditioned by Christ’s death and resurrection and his return. So our theologizing, too, including our treatment of Paul’s theology, ought to be seen as just one aspect of this redemptive-historically conditioned “waiting service.” This, I take it, is one factor that protects our theology from undue abstractions and promotes its true concreteness. This, if you will, is its ultimate “contextualization.”

At issue here, in viewing Paul as a theologian, is whether Scripture, as canon, not only provides the content of our theology, but also contributes to our theological method—how we do theology. If our concern is to uphold “the system of doctrine” “taught” or “contained” in the Bible,¹⁷ then especially in our systematic theology we ought to be alert to the ways in which that systematizing and integrating task is in evidence in the New Testament itself and begins to surface there.

In underlining this approach to our theological task, I do not understand myself to be saying anything other than what is affirmed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.6, namely that the teaching of Scripture is not only what is “expressly set down in Scripture,” but also what “by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.” However, if there is a plus involved in what we are saying here, it is that recognizing continuity, particularly redemptive-historical continuity, between ourselves and the New Testament writers, especially Paul, not only in the content but also in the

17. The reference is to the formula for subscription to the Westminster Standards used in a number of denominations and institutions.

method of our theology, may contribute to ensuring that “the good and necessary consequence . . . deduced” is truly good and necessary.

Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology

Viewing Paul as a theologian in the way we have viewed him prompts a couple of observations on the much-mooted issue of the relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology. First, in exploring Paul’s theology as an aspect of doing biblical theology, we should be aware that we are involved as well in doing systematic theology, or better, that our biblical-theological explorations will inevitably have systematic-theological repercussions. This is so because systematic theology ought to be radically nonspeculative in the sense that its very existence depends upon sound biblical interpretation. Exegesis is its lifeblood, so that the method of systematic theology is fundamentally exegetical.

Accordingly, systematic theology may be aptly characterized as large-scale plot analysis, that is, the presentation under various topics (*loci*), appropriate to the biblical metanarrative (God, creation, man, sin, salvation, the church, etc.), of the *unified* teaching of the Bible as a *whole*. Its distinguishing concern is to bring out and highlight the harmony, the concordant unity, that there is in the biblical documents in their historical variety and diversity. That God himself is the primary author of these documents guarantees that, despite remaining questions and uncertainties that we will always have, Scripture does have such harmony.

Biblical theology, then, is indispensable for providing and regulating the exegesis on which systematic theology is staked and from which it derives. So it is quite wrongheaded to view biblical theology, as do many (primarily those with a historical-critical orientation), as a purely historical-descriptive task, and systematic theology as a contemporary-normative statement

of Christian truth, with each discipline going its separate way, more or less independently. The result is a dichotomization or even polarization between them that continues to be widespread at present. No less polarizing in its effect and bound to lead to hopelessly confused results is the similar approach that sees biblical theology as concerned more or less exclusively with the “humanity,” or human side, of the Bible, with its historically rooted origin and contents, while leaving requisite concern with the divine side to systematic theology.

Instead, there should be a back-and-forth, reciprocal relationship between the two in their common concern with Scripture as God-breathed and normative. Specifically, to be involved with Pauline theology is to be engaged at least implicitly in systematic theology, within a common redemptive-historical context and with the same redemptive-historical focus. This is particularly unavoidable in the case of Paul. The closely intertwined histories of theology and Pauline interpretation, especially since the Reformation, make that reciprocity clear enough. For this reason, it will be appropriate at points throughout this volume to orient our treatment of Paul and relate our findings to developments in the history of theology.

Second, keeping in mind what has already been said above about the canonical context as privileged in interpreting Paul, it is essential for the biblical-theological task, and so for systematic theology, that Paul’s theology not be studied in isolation or as an end in itself. It needs always to be developed, reciprocally, along with and in the light of other New Testament, as well as Old Testament, teaching. This canonical control is, it seems to me, a consideration not sufficiently appreciated, typically by approaches associated with the New Perspective on Paul. One can become so absorbed with Paul’s theology on its own terms and in its own immediate historical context, that it becomes unduly detached from its canonical context and its divinely intended function within Scripture as a whole.

In this regard, the negative example of Marcion, already in the second century, serves as a permanent warning to the church against a one-sided “Paulinism.” A tendentious appeal to Paul in support of a distortion of the gospel is by no means an imaginary danger. Not without reason, Tertullian was reportedly prompted to call Paul *hereticorum apostolos*, “the apostle of heretics.” And subsequent instances of misguided appeals to Paul throughout church history bear out the aptness of this description.

With these general reflections on the study of Paul in mind, we may now begin to consider his teaching on the order of salvation—on the individual Christian’s appropriation of salvation.¹⁸

18. For a fuller treatment of the relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology, see my “Vitality of Reformed Systematic Theology,” in *The Faith Once Delivered: Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne R. Spear*, ed. Anthony Selvaggio (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 1–32. Cf. John Murray, “Systematic Theology,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (4 vols.; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976–1982), 4:1–21.

FOREWORD BY MARK JONES

PROPONENTS OF THE “NEW PERSPECTIVE” on Paul generally reject or minimize the concept of an *ordo salutis* (“order of salvation”) in his writings. Building on the biblical-theological groundwork of the Reformed tradition, Richard B. Gaffin Jr. explores Paul’s understanding of how individuals receive salvation. Gaffin clearly explains the central elements of Paul’s teaching by exploring Paul’s focus on Christ’s death and resurrection and the essence of his *ordo salutis*.

“No one can read this book without being struck again by the depth and coherence of the apostle’s teaching—and by Gaffin’s skill in expounding it.”

—**Moisés Silva**, Formerly Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

“Masterful and penetrating survey of Paul’s teaching on the application of redemption. . . . Should be in the hands of every minister of the Word and student of Scripture.”

—**Guy Prentiss Waters**, Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson

“Brings clarity and precision to recent discussions concerning the content of the divinely revealed gospel proclaimed by the apostle Paul.”

—**Dennis E. Johnson**, Professor of Practical Theology, Westminster Seminary California

“Clear, perceptive, and exegetically satisfying, this potent little book is a valuable—and timely—gift to the church.”

—**Charles E. Hill**, Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando

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