

Dictionary of Paul and His Letters

Preface

“It has long been a matter of controversy among New Testament scholars how best we should interpret the theology of Paul.” If this remark of W. D. Davies was true when he first made it in 1948, the last several decades have seen no resolving of the matter and very few points of consensus.

Yet areas of agreement are to be found, and they are significant. They range from Paul’s Jewish-rabbinic background and the setting of his missionary life and work in a Greco-Roman environment to, and above all, the decisive turning point in his thought and vocation when he became a Christian apostle. To be sure, each of these fields of inquiry has provoked animated discussion, even if there is general agreement among students of Paul that it is within these three sectors of investigation that the ultimate meaning of Paul’s life and ministry and its legacy to the subsequent history of the church is to be located.

The present time is surely opportune to harvest the gains of such inquiries, proposals and investigations. We are sufficiently distant from E. P. Sanders’s epoch-making volume *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), rightly praised, if then pertinently criticized, by J. D. G. Dunn (in his essay “The New Perspective on Paul,” 1983) as breaking the mold of current Pauline research and posing a new set of agenda questions, to attempt a reevaluation and assessment. The team of essayists who have contributed to the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* mainly stand in the shadow of this major new appraisal of Paul’s attitude to the Law, the covenant and the people of Israel, and reflect their reaction, whether positive or cautious, to the “new look” on Paul’s gospel of righteousness by faith and the elements of continuity with the ancestral faith.

This perhaps is the chief reason why the ensuing volume should prove serviceable to a new generation of seminary and college students wishing to interact with the “new look” on Paul and his place in Christian and world history. Parish ministers too will value an up-to-date survey of Paul’s leading ideas as well as find helpful background data in seeking to place the apostle in his time frame. Key articles, however, show the relevance of the Pauline message to the Christian pulpit today, and would-be preachers will not be slow to glean useful insights based on the best modern scholarship, both critical and conservative. The editors venture to believe that their fellows in the professional guild of teachers and researchers will find here a working tool and a conspectus of bibliographical aids and summarized discussions to assist them in their classroom courses and to provoke further discussion.

Yet a wider audience should equally benefit from a handbook like *DPL*. Editorial policy has striven to keep in view the needs of a vast company of lay people who are interested in these letters of the New Testament. We have tried to make each contribution readable to and understandable by the educated person-in-the-pew who, we believe, will welcome this comprehensive study of Paul’s life and labors, his teaching and influence—and the enduring witness he still stands for, centered on the new life in Christ and the church. If this volume serves to introduce Paul to any who are curious about his role in early Christian history and takes Paul out of the study and the sanctuary into the marketplace and the hectic world where moral values are threatened and ethical decisions made, it will have achieved part of its purpose.

It remains to pay tribute to all who have made possible a venture like this. When two of the editors sat down at a noon meal during the Society of Biblical Literature meetings in 1987 to talk over the possibilities of a dictionary like the present one, we had little idea of the complexity and scope of the task. Subsequent editorial meetings, at SBL confer-

ences and at Wheaton College, were soon to impress us with the vast nature of our undertaking. Yet such occasions were memorable as we wrestled with editorial (and theological) decisions in the interest of making a serviceable volume.

Whether we succeeded, the readers will tell. One thing is clear. We would never have come close to our aim without the willing collaboration of the IVP staff and the army of cooperative contributors whose work we were privileged to edit.

Two names need to be mentioned in this regard. The piece by F. F. Bruce (“Paul in Acts and Letters”) was composed within weeks of his lamented death and may represent one of his final contributions to a well-nigh prodigious literary output, chiefly in the field of Pauline studies. The assignment of the major article on “God” was accepted by Donald Guthrie. Alas, he too was to be taken from us before this could even be sketched; yet it was thought fitting if his last written contribution, to crown his life’s work, could be assembled from what he had previously written in his *New Testament Theology*. With family and collegial consent, this has been attempted by one of the editors who has striven to retain as much of Dr. Guthrie’s wording as seemed feasible, with a modicum of updating and reworking.

The entire project is issued in the expectation that it will be of service to readers across the world and will represent a not too unworthy contribution to Pauline scholarship, composed by a wide circle of writers who with the editors have sought to discharge their tasks, in the ancient phrase, *amore Pauli*.

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