

Paul Beyond Perspectives

Edited by
LUDVIG NYMAN,
MIKAEL TELLBE,
and TOMMY WASSERMAN

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament
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Future Challenges in Pauline Studies

Edited by

Ludvig Nyman, Mikael Telbe,
and Tommy Wasserman

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Preface

On March 6–7, 2025, ALT School of Theology in Örebro hosted the conference, “Paul beyond Perspectives: Future Challenges in Pauline Studies,” with generous support from Helge Ax:son Jonssons stiftelse and C. E. Wikströms minnesfond. The conference brought together some 60 scholars and students from eight countries who offered main papers, responses, short seminar papers and participated in stimulating discussions.

As organizers and editors, we take this opportunity to thank all the conference participants who gave valuable input, in particular the respondents to main papers: Anna Enberg, Ludvig Nyman, David Nyström, Rikard Roitto, Gunnar Samuelsson, and Magnus Zetterholm.

For this volume, we have selected a number of excellent contributions by leading scholars from Great Britain, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States. The chapters engage a wide range of current debates and emerging approaches in Pauline studies, with particular attention to questions concerning Paul’s relation to Judaism, the ongoing discussion between different interpretative “perspectives,” and possible ways of moving beyond entrenched scholarly divides. At the same time, the volume explores new methodological and interdisciplinary avenues in memory studies, reception history, leadership theory, literary analysis, and textual criticism, while also revisiting classical questions in fresh ways.

It is our hope that these studies will not only contribute to current discussions but also stimulate further research by fostering constructive dialogue across methodological and disciplinary boundaries, thereby helping to shape the future direction of Pauline scholarship.

Finally, we are very grateful to the Publishing Director at Mohr Siebeck, Tobias Stäbler, as well as the series editor Prof. Dr. Jörg Frey for accepting the volume in WUNT I and for seeing it through to publication.

Örebro, April 2026

*Ludvig Nyman
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Abbreviations

Abbreviations follow the list of abbreviations in *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (2nd ed., Billie Jean Collins et al., eds. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014). Text-critical abbreviations follow NA²⁸ (*Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28th rev. ed., Barbara Aland et al., eds. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012]). In addition, the following abbreviations are used:

AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity (Brill)
CBGM	Coherence-Based Genealogical Method
ECM	Editio Critica Major
JSHJ	Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus (Brill)
TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter
THGNT	Tyndale House Greek New Testament
UTB	Uni-Taschenbücher

Introduction

Mikael Tellbe

Over the past fifty years or so, Pauline studies have been largely shaped by the so-called “New Perspective on Paul” and the ensuing debates. The “New Perspective on Paul” has aimed to challenge the traditional view of Judaism as a “religion of merit” and to move away from an overly individualistic and dogmatic – often Lutheran – interpretation of Paul.

This perspective has, in turn, given rise to what is often referred to as the “Radical New Perspective on Paul” or “Paul within Judaism.” Its proponents argue that the “New Perspective” does not interpret Paul sufficiently within his Jewish context, contending that Paul never broke with Judaism and saw no major theological problems with the Judaism to which he belonged and that he represented.

The ongoing debate between advocates of these perspectives and those who support a more traditional interpretation has significantly influenced Pauline research over the past few decades. This discourse has led to many new insights and stimulating perspectives on Paul. But where do we go from here? What are the future challenges for Pauline studies? Can Pauline studies move beyond these perspectives? What has been overlooked, and what needs to be rediscovered?

These issues were raised and discussed at the scholarly conference “Paul beyond Perspectives: Future Challenges in Pauline Studies,” held at ALT School of Theology, Örebro, Sweden, on March 6–7, 2025. The idea behind this conference was to bring together a group of experienced and senior international and national scholars with a particular focus on Pauline studies, along with some younger scholars, to reflect on the present state of Pauline studies and its future challenges.

The conference gathered scholars from Great Britain, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, and the United States. Scholars who presented main papers and short papers represented several international universities and schools: ALT School of Theology, Ansgar University College, Durham University, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Lund University, MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society, Münster University, Princeton Theological Seminary, Trinity College Bristol, Umeå University, University College Stockholm, and University of Oslo. Even more

universities and schools were represented among the participants: Aberdeen University, Gothenburg University, Johannelund School of Theology, Linköping University, London School of Theology, Uppsala University, and Åbo Akademi University.

1. Contributions

In this conference volume, we have the privilege of publishing the main papers presented at the conference by John Barclay, Samuel Byrskog, Eve-Marie Becker together with Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson, Karin Neutel, Karl Olav Sandnes and Beverly Roberts Gaventa. Besides this we have included some of the shorter papers presented by Carl-Johan Berglund, Jamie Davies, Anna Enberg, Gustaf Henriksson, Ellen Howard, Tommy Wasserman, and Magnus Zetterholm.

John Barclay opens the volume by scrutinizing the scholarly movement that uses the underdetermined label “Paul within Judaism.” Various motivations coincide around a core concern to overcome Christian anti-Judaism, but in its current form it relies on two overly sharp binaries. One is the distinction between “within” and “outside” Judaism, where various factors (ethnicity, discourse, practice, and social recognition) need to be disaggregated, and where the historical evidence suggests complexity and ambiguity, not neat distinctions. The other is that between “Jewish” and “Christian” (where “Jewish” is taken to mean “not Christian”), overlooking the ways in which Paul, for instance, could be both wholly Christocentric and wholly Jewish at the same time. The refusal to allow the etic label “Christian” seems determined more by anti-theological than by historical factors.

Magnus Zetterholm responds to John Barclay’s critique of the overly sharp binaries of the “Paul within Judaism” perspective, arguing that Paul should be situated within the symbolic and discursive world of Second Temple Judaism rather than as an opponent of it. By engaging definitional debates over “Judaism” and “within,” Zetterholm proposes a non-essentialist framework in which both Jews and non-Jews could participate in Jewish traditions. Paul’s Torah practice, his interpretation of the eschatological role of the nations, and his inclusive vision of Jewish-Gentile relations are examined as expressions of a distinctly Jewish discourse. Thus, Paul’s theology is best understood as internal to Judaism.

Following this article, John Barclay gives a short rejoinder, arguing that it was possible for Paul’s Gentile readers to understand themselves as worshipping God, fulfilling the law of God, and reading “the Scriptures” *without* being beholden to Jews or situating themselves “within Judaism.” Paul’s language itself carries the potential to be read beyond the Jewishness that he himself

inhabited. Thus, Barclay still considers it reasonable to call Christ-centric believers, Jewish and Gentile, “Christians.”

Next, Karl Olav Sandnes takes up a debate between John Barclay and Troels Engberg-Pedersen. In *Paul and the Gift* (2015), Barclay argues that divine grace remains – and is incongruous – throughout Christian life. In response, Engberg-Pedersen argues that incongruous grace operates only as a means of entering the “Christ-circle.” Within this circle, the Spirit is operative as power, not grace, which is a once-and-for-all phenomenon. Sandnes’ chapter explores this debate, which has taken Galatians and Romans as its point of departure, but evaluates that debate from a Corinthian perspective. Initial and incongruous grace is also foundational here, but according to Sandnes Paul is not as consistent as Engberg-Pedersen claims. Incongruity is not reserved for entering the Christ-circle; rather, grace and power overlap, and grace is at once past, present, and future. It operates in mortal lives until the final resurrection.

Jamie Davies begins his chapter by pointing out that two of the most lively perspectives on Paul today are those usually labelled with the monikers “Apocalyptic Paul” and “Paul within Judaism.” Both have been the subject of numerous publications, symposia, and seminars at major international conferences. The work of these two groups has, so far, largely been conducted in isolated “silos” within the guild of Pauline scholarship, and rarely through sustained dialogue. Davies imagines a hypothetical conversation between these two approaches – a conversation he considers important for the future of Pauline studies – and suggests what its main talking points might be. Notwithstanding the important methodological differences between the two movements, he shows that there are numerous points of contact that might generate constructive dialogue. These are then examined according to three major theological loci that are characteristic of the Apocalyptic Paul and that are also signature themes of Jewish apocalyptic texts roughly contemporary with the apostle’s letters. Among these are a commitment to revelatory epistemology, a cosmology involving supra-human agents, and a “thoroughgoing eschatology.”

In her contribution, Beverly Roberts Gaventa explores how contemporary Pauline scholarship might be reshaped through deeper engagement with its interpretive predecessors. Taking her inspiration from Margaret Mitchell’s characterization of patristic exegesis as “portraiture,” Gaventa begins with the premise that every interpreter constructs a portrait of Paul – and does so in conversation not only with the apostle’s letters but also with earlier readers. Yet, despite the rapid growth of reception-historical research, the history of Pauline interpretation often functions as a parallel subdiscipline, exerting little influence on mainstream exegetical work. To address this disconnect, Gaventa examines three illustrative cases: sixteenth-century Protestant interpreters, African American readings of Paul, and Karl Barth’s commentary on Romans. Across these case studies, she argues that attention to our predecessors serves

not merely to correct the historical record but to expose blind spots in contemporary scholarship and to invigorate exegetical practice. Engaging earlier interpreters is thus both an ethical responsibility and a methodological opportunity. Pauline scholarship moves forward most fruitfully when it reaches back – expanding its circle of conversation partners and allowing past portraits of Paul to interrogate and refine our own.

Karin Neutel argues that the future of Pauline studies lies in focusing on Paul within Christianity. She identifies two persistent problems in the discipline: the investment in Paul as a person, and a neglect of the historical and contemporary reception of Paul. While she recognizes the significance of understanding the Pauline letters historically in the context of first-century Judaism, she argues that both problems are likely to be exacerbated when the focus in scholarship is limited to Paul's Jewish context. Instead, the direction of the discipline should be informed by the recognition that the history of interpretation ties Pauline studies inescapably to Christianity and that "within Christianity" is where its academic and wider social relevance are located.

Samuel Byrskog turns to memory studies as a future prospect for Pauline studies, maintaining that memory studies have strong explanatory potential. This chapter focuses on memory as a means of negotiating meaning and belonging and seeks to develop the recent temporal turn in New Testament studies through the idea that human experience takes place within time and in the face of death. The theory of episodic memory is applied to four aspects of Paul's letter to the Romans, namely the fact that he dictates the letter from Corinth and copes with his memories from previous visits there; that he stresses his Jewish heritage; that he uses many quotations from the LXX and alludes to the Jesus tradition; and that he frames his mission by refashioning his memory to include the grand apocalyptic narrative of history. These four examples indicate how he negotiates a temporal identity, using memory to foster meaning and belonging in time.

Eve-Marie Becker and Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson explore the possibilities for research on the "Intellectual Paul" as a plea for moving beyond current scholarly divides. By examining Paul's epistolary activity through the theoretical lenses of modern historical biography and transformational leadership, Paul emerges as an intellectual actor who utilizes both "intellectual stimulation" and "inspirational motivation" in his letters. First Thessalonians 4:13–18 demonstrates that Paul formulates new religious knowledge concerning eschatological scenarios, such as the *παρουσία* of Christ, to offer pastoral consolation and hope to communities with a pagan background. Understanding Paul's authorial thinking within the context of his education, missionary context, personal experience, and concept of letter-writing, is crucial to show that he was a source of religious ideas and founder of long-term institutions (*ἐκκλησίαι*). The methodological promise of an "Intellectual Paul" is to evaluate Paul by his internal

situational and epistolary logic, thereby avoiding superimposed anachronisms in scholarship.

Carl Johan Berglund argues that as an author of elaborate Greek epistles, the apostle Paul undeniably participated in a Greco-Roman literary culture where oratory was not only encapsulated in written form but also analyzed using methods such as textual criticism (διορθωτικόν), word studies (γλωσσηματικόν), grammatical analysis (τεχνικόν), analysis of what the text refers to in the extratextual world (ιστορικόν), and critique of its style and meter (μετρικόν). If we assume that Paul had at least a partial Greco-Roman education, we can recognize the passages in First Corinthians where he identifies his opponents as failed grammarians (1 Cor 1:20), applies the methods of ancient literary criticism (9:9–11; 15:26–28), and cites one of its most important interpretive principles (4:6). These traces do not make Paul an expert in ancient literary criticism, but indicate that he found it useful to demonstrate the abilities he did have to strengthen his authority among the Corinthian Christians.

Tommy Wasserman presents nine proposed revisions to the text of the Pauline Letters in Nestle-Aland 28 (NA28 = UBS5/6), based on his text-critical work for the Swedish Bible Society's NT 2026 translation project. An appendix lists a further thirty-two passages where the author prefers readings different from NA28. Wasserman applies reasoned eclecticism, weighing both external manuscript evidence and internal considerations, and anticipates the future application of the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM) to the Pauline corpus in the *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM). The proposed revisions concern Rom 14:12; 1 Cor 10:2; 15:49; 2 Cor 1:10; 5:3; Gal 2:20; Col 1:7; 3:6; and 2 Tim 2:14, with the preferred readings supported by varying combinations of internal and external evidence. The results indicate that several NA28 decisions in the Pauline corpus remain text-critically uncertain and may require reconsideration. Comparison with other critical editions (SBLGNT and THGNT) shows both agreements and divergences, highlighting the future need for continued reassessment of the Pauline text prior to the completion of the ECM.

According to Ellen Howard, recent Pauline scholarship, particularly within the “Paul within Judaism” paradigm, has devoted sustained attention to Gal 1:13–17 as a key text for reconstructing Paul's Jewish identity. While previous studies have yielded important historical and conceptual insights, they have often done so at the expense of close attention to the narrative and rhetorical function of the passage within the letter itself. Howard's chapter therefore proposes a shift in focus from questions of identity to questions of narrative strategy and argumentative function. Drawing from narratological concepts such as narrative focalization, the analysis demonstrates that the narrative's argumentative climax does not lie in the revelation of Christ itself, but in Paul's actions following that revelation – specifically his refusal to seek human authorization and his subsequent movements independent of Jerusalem. By foregrounding

these elements and relegating the revelatory event to a subordinate clause, Paul directs the reader toward the decisive claim that his gospel derives from divine, not human, origins. More broadly, Howard argues that debates over Paul's Jewish identity, though significant, risk obscuring the narrative logic of the text under consideration. Moving beyond such perspectives, she highlights the need for greater integration of narratological and rhetorical analysis as a future challenge for Pauline studies.

In dialogue with David Lincicum's article "Mirror-Reading a Pseudepigraphal Letter", Anna Enberg deals with questions concerning authorship, methodology, and the relevance of the local historical context for the interpretation of the letter to the Colossians. An evaluation of which authorship theories that can be considered viable is carried out here, as well as an assessment of related methodological problems. Engberg argues that despite the difficulties presented by comparisons between the so-called genuine Pauline letters and Colossians in terms of style and theological content, it is still necessary to note the significance of the Colossian address. Based on historical and archaeological research on Colossae and the Lycus valley, it can be confidently argued that the letter fits exceptionally well within this local historical context. A complete geographical displacement of the letter is thus not necessary. A reflection is also given on how different approaches to Colossians might affect the place of the letter in Pauline studies moving forward.

Finally, Gustaf Henriksson probes some semantic relations between Second Timothy and Philippians, focusing on how these letters perceive and present salvation as well as gospel ministry. He argues that they are akin in multiple ways, presenting imprisonment and suffering as integral parts of gospel ministry, as they become an enactment of Christ's suffering and victorious path. Christ's resurrection life and the presence of the Spirit are central to salvation discourse, and the same combination of cultic and athletic metaphors with the term *σπένδομαι* and the thought on shame suggests this. A life lived in the likeness of Christ, including suffering as an integral part of serving Christ, functions as a gospel enactment of sorts. Henriksson concludes that there are therefore good grounds – conceptually, theologically, and perhaps also lexically – for regarding Second Timothy as an authentic Pauline letter, which should be included in Pauline studies proper.

2. Where Do We Go from Here?

The contributions in this conference volume span a considerable number of topics, from issues specifically addressing the old, new, and radical perspectives on Paul to areas covering the apocalyptic perspective on Paul, Paul in his Greco-Roman setting, textual criticism of the Pauline texts, memory studies, and reception history. What conclusions can be drawn from all this? Is it

possible to move beyond perspectives? Is it desirable? And what are the future challenges for Pauline studies?

The chapters in this volume may be divided into four groups: the first group deals with issues in the current debate between different perspectives on Paul, the second and third groups suggest new courses for Pauline studies, and the fourth group points to new directions for old questions.

First, several contributions discuss issues that explicitly relate to Paul's relation to his Jewish background and recent discussions about whether Paul is within Judaism or not. Should Paul be understood fully within? John Barclay shows that the present debate about "Paul within Judaism" seems somewhat confused due to a lack of clarity on the key terms, while being over-determined by hidden assumptions and over-burdened by rhetorical postures. He argues that we cannot move beyond the different perspectives on Paul and reminds us of the importance of greater sensitivity and clearer definitions in the terminology employed in discussing these issues, in particular avoiding the construction of "binary opposites" – such as the "in"/"out"-binary and the Jewish/Christian binary in relation to Paul and his assemblies – that do not work in practice. To this Magnus Zetterholm responds in a constructive dialogue, demonstrating that it is possible to have a good dialogue between proponents of different positions. Although Barclay and Zetterholm may differ in definitions and conclusions, they also demonstrate that they have much in common. In fact, their dialogue ends with an acknowledgement that, despite their differences, they broadly agree in their interpretation of Paul on a crucial issue in the debate, namely how the salvation of the Jewish people is to be understood in relation to Jesus Christ. In a similar way, Jamie Davies seeks to put the "Paul within Judaism" perspective in dialogue with the "Apocalyptic Paul"-perspective, demonstrating that there are numerous points of contact that might generate a constructive dialogue between the proponents of these perspectives.

Karl Olav Sandnes picks up on an ongoing debate concerning the definition and impact of grace in Paul, building on John Barclay's claim that grace is a "continuing reality of the Christian life" and responding to Troels Engberg-Pedersen's claim that grace is a "once-and-for-all" phenomenon. This serves to clarify and deepen the debate. Sandnes demonstrates from the Corinthian letters that "God's gifts on a continuous basis are secured by the foundational gift once given", which means that Barclay's main thesis about grace also works in these letters. Sandnes' chapter spurs a renewed interest in theological issues, such as soteriology and anthropology. It also reminds us of the constant need to negotiate between, on the one hand, the letters (specificity), and, on the other, what we label Paul's theology (a more holistic perspective).

Overall, these chapters demonstrate the need for constructive dialogue between different perspectives, pointing to the importance of humility, self-awareness and self-critical honesty in our task of doing exegesis. The aim of the conference was, of course, not to go "beyond perspectives" in the sense of

forgetting or neglecting past discussions. However, the conference demonstrated the importance of going beyond unnecessary polarization and how fruitful discussions can happen when scholars listen with respect to each other. Indeed, this is a way to move forward.

Secondly, there are a group of contributors who suggest various new paths for future Pauline studies. Samuel Byrskog argues that the understanding of memory provides a deeper understanding of Paul's theology, highlighting his "grand narrative of history" and his "eschatological and apocalyptic experience of being 'in Christ'." Thus, employing a "memory"-perspective on Paul will help us to understand Paul not only in theoretical terms, but also by focusing on his "temporality of existence," and the temporal experiences that have formed his memory of Jesus Christ. Byrskog's emphasis on the central role of experience in the process of shaping Paul's memory is a great challenge to Pauline studies. Since Paul builds much of his theology on his own experience of being in Christ and the presence of God's empowering Spirit, there is a need to develop a Pauline theology of experience. The challenge is, of course, how this should be done.

The chapter by Eve-Marie Becker and Sigurvin Lárus Jónsson on the "Intellectual Paul" and transformative leadership, representing a recent German take on Paul, demonstrates that leadership studies – applied to ancient sources and authors – offer a fruitful heuristic frame for Pauline studies, since they focus on religious historical and theological perspectives on Paul which can move beyond the various "within"-debates. Their study demonstrates that Paul is not considered merely as an object of study in the history of religion, but as an intellectual actor whose thinking must be interpreted within a fourfold framework: his Jewish background and education, the Hellenistic-Roman missionary context, his personal experience of Christ, and his concept of (apostolic) letter-writing. Further, they also set Paul within an explicit ecclesiological context – for example, how Paul forms and transforms the mindset of his churches by "inspirational motivation" in First Thessalonians – which opens up issues touching on practical theological issues. Finally, they demonstrate the importance of working interdisciplinary in Pauline studies, collaborating with other disciplines such as transformational leadership theory in the quest to understand Paul in and behind the texts.

Following this route of setting the Jewish apostle Paul in a Hellenistic-Roman setting, Carl-Johan Berglund argues that we can use the ancient literary-critical tradition to interpret some of the more obscure passages in First Corinthians. In this letter, the apostle undeniably participated in a Greco-Roman literary culture where oratory was not only encapsulated in written form but also analyzed using specific methods.

Also setting Pauline theology in the cultural and religious context of the Hellenistic-Roman world, Anna Enberg urges us to broaden our perspectives on what Pauline theology could have looked like. She maintains that the

interpretation of the Pauline nature of Colossian theology has been disadvantaged by the dominating perspectives in Pauline studies: the “old,” “new,” and “radical new” perspectives on Paul all concentrate on questions concerning the relationship between Jews and non-Jews within the Pauline communities, raising the question of whether this has led to a perception of Pauline theology that is too narrow. Instead of labelling Colossians as something totally foreign to Pauline theology, she urges us to continue discussing the relationship between the content of Colossians and the undisputed Pauline letters.

Thirdly, there are two chapters in particular that propose a way forward by paying attention to our predecessors and former interpreters of Paul. Both Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Karin Neutel point to the need not only to dig for the historical Jewish Paul, but also to understand Paul through the voice of former interpreters, urging us not to neglect the history of the interpretation and reception of Paul. Karin Neutel argues that Pauline studies would benefit from putting Paul’s Christian legacy explicitly at the center of its enquiry, seeing Paul’s writings not as windows into his soul but rather as sources that are significant especially for their historical reception. She concludes that since Paul as the object of Pauline studies is within Christianity, we cannot put Paul back into Judaism. In a similar way, Gaventa argues that to ignore our predecessors, continuing to act as if the history of interpretation is a separate discipline that has no claim on our time, is a lapse in professional ethics. Pauline scholarship moves forward most fruitfully when it reaches back – expanding its circle of conversation partners and allowing past portraits of Paul to interrogate and refine our own. Hence, Neutel and Gaventa challenge us to make new discoveries by turning to old interpretations.

Finally, while focusing on old questions, we have a group of contributors who suggest new directions and readings of the Pauline texts. After having discussed nine specific textual problems in the *Corpus Paulinum*, Tommy Wasserman argues for a number of new readings rather than those preferred in the dominant hand-edition, NA28 (=UBS6), highlighting the future need for continued reassessment of the Pauline text prior to the completion of the Editio Critica Maior (ECM). Thus, he challenges us to continue the essential and challenging task of settling the earliest Pauline texts.

Ellen Howard points out that recent Pauline scholarship, particularly within the “Paul within Judaism” paradigm, has devoted sustained attention to Gal 1:13–17 as a key text for reconstructing Paul’s Jewish identity. Howard argues that debates over Paul’s Jewish identity, though significant, risk obscuring the narrative logic of the text under consideration. Moving beyond such perspectives, she highlights the need for greater integration of narratological and rhetorical analysis as a future challenge for Pauline studies.

By considering philological and theological similarities in Philippians and Second Timothy, Gustaf Henriksson concludes that the stylistic and lexical evidence often cited against Pauline authorship of Second Timothy could be re-

evaluated as the natural outcome of thematic intensification in the letter. This poses a renewed challenge of how to relate this letter and the two others often lumped together as “the Pastoral Letters” to the earlier letters of Paul – a challenge that may be fruitful by relating one or two of them to other Pauline texts and themes. Thus, Henriksson urges us to take up the discussion, once again, of the authenticity of Second Timothy.

In sum, the authors in this volume urge us to move forward in Pauline studies – not by leaving old perspectives behind, but by learning from them and listening to one another in respectful dialogue. As this volume shows, there are many challenges and new directions for future Pauline studies. Let us then listen to these contributions, learn from them, and move forward.

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