

# Book Review Essay

Susan Grover Eastman, *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), xvi + 207 pp. \$34.99

Reviewed by Daniel Lioy

SUSAN GROVER EASTMAN (HEREAFTER “the author”) is an Associate Research Professor Emerita of New Testament at Duke Divinity School. In her 2017 book, *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology*,<sup>1</sup> she challenges traditional views of the apostle's understanding of humanity. These approaches often portray his anthropology (the study of humans and human behavior and societies in the past and present) as dualistic, separating the body (material) from the soul (immaterial). The author argues for a more holistic perspective, especially by drawing on recent advancements in philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience. Through this heuristic lens, the author offers a fresh reading of Paul's writings, particularly by emphasizing the human person as a unified being consisting of both body and spirit.

The following book review provides a chapter-by-chapter analysis and critique of the author's work. It begins with the volume's Introduction and ends with its Conclusion, followed by an overall assessment of the publication's contribution to the field of study.

## Introduction: The Puzzle of Pauline Anthropology

### Summary

PAUL'S VIEW OF SELFHOOD is layered and complex. For instance, he viewed it as being shaped by both negative (sin) and positive (Christ) influences. This chapter reinterprets the apostle's concept of participatory (or corporate) identity through the lens of ancient thought (Epictetus) and modern (or contemporary) ideas of embodied, social personhood (yet without anachronism). What follows is a breakdown of the main points.

- *The Puzzle of Pauline Identity*: The author delves into the intriguing concept of a functional Pauline anthropology, exploring how the apostle portrays the self as deeply influenced by its relationships and involvement in both positive (Christ) and negative (sin, death) forces. Paul's unique perspective on identity is particularly evident in specific passages (e.g., Rom 7:15–18, 20; Gal 2:19–20), where he utilizes an unusual grammatical construction (i.e., “I no longer [verb], but [subject plus verb] in me”).

- *A Second-Person Perspective*: The author proposes a fresh approach to understanding Pauline anthropology by engaging with ancient thinkers (e.g., the Stoic philosopher Epictetus; c. 55–135 AD) and contemporary ideas about personhood from philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience. This “second-person hermeneutic” emphasizes how relationships, not isolation, shape our identities.
- *Illuminating Paul in New Light*: On the one hand, the author does not think there is any direct influence or complete alignment between Paul’s ideas and viewpoints arising outside of Scripture. On the other hand, the book seeks to shed new light on the apostle’s teachings by viewing them through the heuristic lens of an interdisciplinary conversation. The goal is not simply to repeat the apostle’s words but also to “interpret” them, that is, to express his anthropological insights in terms relevant to people today living in the global North (which is strongly shaped by a focus on self-reliance and personal independence).

### Key Areas of Exploration

The author delves into several key issues, as follows:

- *Embodied and Social Identity*: How our physical bodies and social interactions influence the ways in which we think about and understand ourselves.
- *Participation and the Self*: How our involvement in relationships shapes our sense of agency and responsibility.
- *Transformation and Flourishing*: How lasting change and human flourishing occur within this participatory framework, especially in light of Christ’s own participation in human existence.

### Structure and Approach

The author’s treatise is divided into two main sections, as follows:

- *Part 1: A Three-Way Conversation* introduces the key figures in this dialogue (namely, Epictetus, contemporary theorists, and Paul’s use of body language).
- *Part 2: Participation and the Self* examines three crucial Pauline texts (Romans 7, Philippians 2, and Galatians 2, respectively) through the preceding interdisciplinary lens.

The author acknowledges the experimental nature of the above approach. It is offered as a provocative and suggestive way to reframe one’s understanding of Pauline anthropology.

## Chapter 1: The Way of Freedom

### Summary

THIS CHAPTER DELVES INTO EPICETUS' nuanced perspective on the self. The author dissects how the stoic philosopher emphasized self-awareness, rationality, and individual agency as core components of human identity while simultaneously recognizing the connection people have to something larger. What follows is a breakdown of the main points.

- *Divine Spark and Self-Perception*: Epictetus believed humans possess an innate “fragment of the divine,” which grants self-awareness and the ability to analyze incoming stimuli (impressions). This allows people to distinguish between objective reality and their subjective interpretations.
- *Inner Detachment and Prohairesis*: Epictetus advocated disengaging from external factors like wealth, relationships, and even one's physical body. Instead, the focus should be on *prohairesis* (προαίρεσις). This ancient Greek philosophical concept refers to a person's volition or will. It is often translated as “moral character” or “power of choice.” It emphasizes control over people's internal judgments and desires, not external circumstances.
- *Freedom through Alignment*: Epictetus maintained that people achieve a profound sense of freedom by aligning their *prohairesis* with the universal reason or *logos* (λόγος) that governs the cosmos (often referred to as divine providence). This freedom comes from accepting what people cannot control and focusing on what they can, such as their own thoughts, judgments, and actions.
- *Social Embeddedness and Education*: The above notwithstanding, Epictetus did not advocate for complete isolation. He recognized the inherent connection people have to the social and cosmic order. The philosopher believed that philosophical education was crucial to re-discovering this “divine spark” within people and fulfilling their role within the larger whole.
- *Individual vs. Cosmic Self*: A central tension exists in Epictetus' view. His emphasis on *prohairesis* suggests an individualistic perspective. However, the concept of aligning with the cosmic logos implies a more participatory, objective view of the self as part of a larger order.
- *Contrasting Interpretations*: The chapter explores the difference between interpreting Epictetus through a modern, individualistic lens versus seeing him as advocating for an integrated self that finds freedom

through rational participation in the divine cosmic order. This distinction is crucial for obtaining a more comprehensive understanding of his philosophy.

### Potential Strengths

- *A Holistic Interpretation of Epictetus*: The author's analysis accurately captures core concepts of Epictetus' philosophy, including the "divine spark" (a fragment of the divine within people), *prohairesis* (the faculty of rational choice), alignment with the universal order (logos), and the tension between individual identity and belonging to a larger cosmic whole.
- *Contrasting present-day individualism with Epictetan cosmic integration*: The author provides valuable insight by differentiating contemporary individualistic perspectives (i.e., in a recent, historical sense) with Epictetus' emphasis on integrating with the cosmic order.
- *Clearly communicates complex ideas*: The well-organized structure effectively presents complex ideas in a clear and accessible manner.

### Potential Areas for Improvement

- *Further exploration of Stoic social ethics*: While the author's analysis mentions the importance of social connection, a deeper dive into Epictetus' view on relationships and one's duties to others within the framework of the cosmic order would be beneficial.
- *Greater Examination of Stoic emotional control for self-improvement*: The author's exploration of Epictetus' perspective on emotions and their role (or lack thereof) in achieving a well-cultivated self could further strengthen the analysis.
- *Additional Clarification of Epictetus' Nuanced View of Prohairesis*: The author's critique of *prohairesis* as radical detachment could benefit from further refinement. Epictetus likely saw it more as recognizing what falls within one's control—including one's judgments and choices—rather than a complete emotional disengagement from external events.
- *Provision of Alternative Viewpoints*: The author's inclusion of potential criticisms or alternative viewpoints to Epictetus' ideas would add balance and demonstrate a more evenhanded approach to the discourse.

## Chapter 2 “Who Are You?”: Contemporary Perspectives on the Person

### Summary

THIS CHAPTER DELVES INTO CONTEMPORARY debates about the nature of the self. The author draws on philosophers like Shaun Gallagher (who emphasizes social interaction) and psychologists like Vasudevi Reddy (who explores mirroring and intersubjectivity). What follows is a breakdown of the main points.

To begin, two key perspectives emerge:

- *First-person perspectives*: These approaches view the self as primarily constructed through internal reflection and understanding one’s own mental states. This aligns with “simulation theory,” which suggests people understand others by projecting their own experiences onto others.
- *Second-person perspectives*: These approaches propose that the self is fundamentally shaped by embodied interactions with others, beginning in infancy. It is argued that self-awareness arises from being the object of others’ attention and engagement.

Next, the chapter builds upon the second-person view by highlighting evidence from psychology and neuroscience. The author discusses phenomena like neonatal imitation, mirror neurons in the brain, and the intricate dance between infants and caregivers—all suggesting an inherent social nature of the self from birth.

The chapter then explores how second-person accounts possibly align with Pauline theology. His anthropology (as noted earlier, understanding of humanity) and cosmology (understanding of the universe) emphasize a relational self that is shaped by active connections with others and God. This may have affinities with the intersubjective model presented earlier.

The above observations notwithstanding, the chapter raises a critical question: *Can a purely naturalistic framework (focusing only on natural explanations) fully encompass the unique relationship Paul described between humans and God?* After all, the apostle seemed to envision a connection with God that transcends the natural world, where the Creator is radically “other” yet intimately close. This point of tension sets the stage for further exploration of Paul’s specific view on the self in relation to sin, human limitations (the “flesh”), and participation in the life of Christ.

### Potential Strengths

- *Self in Philosophy and Psychology*: The chapter provides a comprehensive overview of contemporary debates surrounding the nature of the self, especially by drawing from diverse perspectives in philosophy and psychology.

- *Balanced and Multifaceted View*: The chapter presents a balanced view by examining both first-person and second-person approaches and allowing for a nuanced understanding of the topic.
- *Evidence-Based Perspective*: The chapter effectively synthesizes empirical evidence from psychology and neuroscience to support the second-person perspective, which lends credibility to the author's arguments.
- *Second-Person Theological Lens*: The connections drawn between the second-person view and Pauline theology offer an intriguing theological lens through which to understand the nature of the self.
- *Naturalism's Theological Limitations*: The chapter raises thought-provoking questions about the limitations of a purely naturalistic framework in capturing the unique relationship between humans and God, as described by Paul.

### Potential Areas for Improvement

- *Lacks Critical Depth*: While the chapter provides a solid overview, it could benefit from more in-depth analysis and critique of the various perspectives presented.
- *Underdeveloped First-Person Critique*: The critique of the first-person perspective could be expanded, as it currently receives less attention compared to the second-person view.
- *Deeper Implications of Pauline Selfhood*: The chapter could delve deeper into the specific implications of Pauline theology for understanding the nature of the self beyond the initial connections the author made.
- *Nature vs. Faith Gap*: The tension between naturalistic explanations and Paul's conception of the human-divine relationship is identified. Yet, the chapter could further explore potential resolutions or reconciliations.
- *Limited Scope*: While the chapter covers diverse perspectives, it could potentially incorporate additional insights from other philosophical traditions or cultural contexts to broaden the discourse.
- *Lacks Clear Transitions*: Some readers may find the frequent transitions between philosophical, psychological, and theological domains challenging to follow, which is why the chapter could benefit from smoother transitions or clearer signposting.

## Chapter 3 Embodied and Embedded: The Corporeal Reality of Pauline Participation

### Summary

THIS CHAPTER DELVES INTO PAUL'S use of the terms σῶμα ("body") and σὰρξ ("flesh"), as well as explores how these shape our understanding of embodiment and personhood. The author analyzes the apostle's perspective within its historical context and attempts to connect it to contemporary philosophical discussions. What follows is a breakdown of the main points.

- *The Body as a Conduit*: Paul's use of σῶμα ("body") and σὰρξ ("flesh") suggests a profound connection between our embodied existence and larger cosmic realities. These realities include the presence of Satan, sin, and death, along with the believers' redemption through faith in Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit. Here, the body is not merely a passive container for the soul but rather the very medium through which humans interact with and are shaped by these metaphysical verities.
- *Ancient vs. Modern Views of the Body*: Dale Martin highlights the contrast between ancient and contemporary views of the body. In the ancient world, the body was seen as porous, interconnected with the cosmos, and susceptible to social influences. This perspective stands in stark opposition to the contemporary Western Cartesian notion of the individual as a self-contained, autonomous entity. Interestingly, some contemporary theories resonate with these ancient notions, proposing that the self is constructed through our embodied relationships with the environment.
- *Bultmann vs. Käsemann on the Body and Self*: The chapter compares two prominent interpretations of Paul's understanding of the body. Specifically, Rudolf Bultmann views the body as the seat of self-awareness and potential autonomy. This perspective suggests a capacity for self-knowledge that precedes our interaction with others. In contrast, Ernst Käsemann emphasizes the profound vulnerability inherent in our corporeality. We are embedded in forces beyond our control, making our bodies the sites where we experience this radical vulnerability. According to Käsemann, the notion of a self-sufficient, independent individual is an illusion for Paul. Our identity is entirely shaped by and dependent on our subjection to cosmic powers, whether the grip of sin or the transformative gift of the Spirit.
- *Connecting Paul to Contemporary Thought*: The preceding overview suggests intriguing connections between Paul's thought, ancient per-

spectives on the body (including Stoic ideas from figures like Epictetus), and contemporary theories that explore the concept of an interconnected, participatory self. These modern postulates hypothesize that the self is constituted through our embodied relationships with the environment and larger social matrices.

### Potential Strengths

- *Embodiment and Personhood*: The chapter offers a thoughtful investigation of Paul's usage of σῶμα ("body") and σάρξ ("flesh"), especially by highlighting their importance in comprehending embodiment and personhood within the apostle's theology.
- *Greco-Roman Parallels*: The chapter effectively situates Paul's views within the historical and philosophical context of the ancient world, particularly by drawing parallels with Greco-Roman conceptions of the body's permeability and interconnection with the cosmos.
- *Interpretations of Two Luminaries*: By comparing Bultmann's and Käsemann's interpretations, the chapter provides valuable insights into contrasting perspectives on the body's role, including self-awareness and autonomy versus vulnerability and susceptibility to external forces.
- *Connections between Ancient and Modern Perspectives*: The chapter establishes intriguing links between Paul's thought, ancient philosophical ideas (e.g., Stoicism), and contemporary theories about the interconnected, participatory self, effectively bridging the gap between ancient and present-day perspectives.

### Potential Areas for Improvement

- *Body-Self Analysis Gap*: While the analysis discusses the contrast between ancient and more recent views of the body, a more explicit exploration of how these differing perspectives impact our contemporary understanding of personhood and identity would further strengthen the chapter.
- *Pauline Textual Analysis Needed*: The comparison between Bultmann and Käsemann is intriguing. Yet, delving deeper into specific passages from Paul's writings that support or challenge their interpretations would provide more textual grounding.
- *Greater Integration of Counterarguments*: The chapter could explore critiques or counterarguments to the concept of a participatory self proposed by contemporary theories and how these might reconcile with or challenge Paul's perspective.



- *Inadequate Philosophical Discussion*: The chapter could benefit from offering a more comprehensive and nuanced discussion. This includes incorporating additional perspectives from other ancient philosophers or religious thinkers alongside a broader range of contemporary theories on embodiment and personhood.
- *Insufficient Consideration of Ethical Implications*: In addition to building upon connections between ancient and contemporary thought, the chapter could further examine the implications for our understanding of ethics, morality, and lived experience in the present-day world.

## Chapter 4 Rationality Gone Mad: The Evacuation of the Self in Romans 7

### Summary

THIS CHAPTER DELVES INTO PAUL'S depiction of the self in Romans 7:7–25. Here, the apostle portrays an “inner self” (sometimes translated as “the mind” or “inner being”) that desires to do good yet finds itself captive to a powerful force he calls “sin.” This sin is not just an abstract concept; it is a personified entity with dominion over the self, causing it to act against its own will. What follows is a breakdown of the main points.

- *Relational Self*: Paul rejects the idea of the self as a completely isolated and independent entity (like the Stoic ideal). Instead, the apostle emphasizes a relational self shaped by its interactions within a larger cosmic reality. In this reality, the dominant force is not reason but sin, which has become deeply embedded.
- *Colonized by Sin*: The language of being “sold under sin” and sin “dwelling” within the self is particularly powerful. It suggests that sin has invaded and taken control, overriding the self's own desires and ability to act freely.
- *Beyond Stoicism*: Paul's teaching stands in stark contrast to the Stoic philosophy, which emphasized the self's mastery over emotions and actions through reason alone. For the apostle, reason is not enough. The self is too deeply entangled with sin to achieve liberation on its own. Divine intervention is necessary.
- *Ancient and Modern Parallels*: The concept of sin as an invasive force can be compared to ancient models of disease as pollution that enters the body and disrupts its natural balance. Additionally, Paul's view may also be analogous to contemporary therapeutic ideas about how

unhealthy relational patterns can become internalized, distorting the self's perception and behavior.

- *Redemption through Christ*: Ultimately, Paul offers hope through Christ. Jesus, through his sacrificial death and resurrection, participates in the human struggle with sin (mimetic participation). This paves the way for a new relational matrix centered on communion with God through the Spirit.

### Potential Strengths

- *Thoughtful Analysis*: The critique provides an engaging analysis of Paul's depiction of the self in Romans 7:7–25, particularly by exploring various aspects and implications of his perspective.
- *Contextual Framing*: The critique effectively contextualizes Paul's view of the self by contrasting it with the Stoic philosophy of the time, which helps the reader understand the uniqueness and significance of the apostle's perspective.
- *Interdisciplinary Connections*: The analysis draws parallels between Paul's concept of sin and contemporary therapeutic ideas, as well as ancient models of disease, demonstrating the relevance and applicability of the apostle's ideas across different domains.
- *Theological Grounding*: The critique highlights the theological foundation of Paul's perspective, especially his belief in the necessity of divine intervention through Christ for redemption from sin's influence on the self.

### Potential Areas for Improvement

- *Limited Scriptural References*: While the analysis focuses on Romans 7:7–25, it could benefit from incorporating additional biblical references or passages that support or further elucidate Paul's view of the self.
- *Expansion on the Redemptive Process*: The section on redemption through Christ could be expanded to provide a more detailed explanation of how this redemptive process unfolds and how it impacts the self's relationship with sin.
- *Alternative Interpretations*: The discourse presents a singular interpretation of Paul's depiction of the self. Acknowledging and addressing potential alternative interpretations or debates within biblical scholarship could add depth and nuance to the analysis.

- *Historical Context:* While the presentation contrasts Paul's view with Stoic philosophy, it could benefit from further exploration of the broader historical and cultural context in which the apostle was writing, as this may shed additional light on his perspective.
- *Practical Implications:* The presentation could be strengthened by discussing the practical implications of Paul's view of the self for individuals or communities, particularly in relation to personal transformation, spiritual growth, or ethical decision-making.

## Chapter 5 Divine Participation: The New Christological Agent in Philippians 2

### Summary

THIS CHAPTER PROPOSES A DISTINCTIVE perspective on Jesus' role in Philippians 2:5–11. The author suggests this passage goes beyond regarding Christ as a mere ethical example. Through the incarnation, crucifixion, and his ongoing presence, Jesus offers redemption and a fundamental transformation of human identity and agency through a participatory and reciprocal relationship with God. What follows is a breakdown of the main points.

- *Preexistent Christ and Hypostatic Union (v. 6):* The passage begins by establishing Christ's preexistence "in the form of God." Jesus' divinity is not abandoned but united with his humanity in the concept known as the hypostatic union.
- *Incarnation and Assimilation (vv. 7–8):* Christ "emptied himself" by taking on the form of a bondservant and becoming fully human. This is not mere "impersonation" but a true embodiment (incarnation) that allows him to experience humanity's limitations and suffering ("assimilation").
- *Obedience, Sacrifice, and Redemption (vv. 8–9):* By humbly submitting to death on a cross, Christ participates in and overcomes humanity's bondage to sin and death (redemption). His obedience is crucial. God's response to this sacrificial act is Christ's exaltation.
- *Reciprocal Participation and Transformed Agency (vv. 12–13):* While emphasizing God's work in salvation, Paul encouraged believers to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." This "reciprocal participation" involves human effort operating in conjunction with God's grace. Through this union with Christ, believers' agency is not taken away but transformed and empowered.

- *Intersubjective Personhood and Relational Identity*: The passage hints at an “intersubjective” understanding of personhood, where human identity is not self-made but rather shaped through a saving relationship with God, particularly through Christ’s taking on the human condition.

### Potential Strengths

- *Thoughtful Exegesis*: The discourse explores key aspects of Philippians 2:5–11, including Christ’s pre-incarnational existence, becoming human (incarnation), obedience, sacrifice, and exaltation. The chapter also delves into the implications for believers’ participation in salvation and transformation.
- *Theological Engagement*: The chapter engages with pertinent theological concepts like the hypostatic union, assimilation, redemption, and reciprocal participation, demonstrating an awareness of the passage’s theological weight.
- *Transformation Emphasis*: The discussion highlights how Christ’s work not only saves but also transforms, impacting human identity, agency, and personhood through the believers’ connection with him.
- *Contextual Awareness*: The chapter attempts to situate the passage within the broader context of Philippians and Paul’s overall theology, particularly by recognizing its connections to other Pauline themes and ideas.

### Potential Areas for Improvement

- *Limited Scholarly Engagement*: While the discourse covers core theological concepts, it could benefit from directly addressing scholarly debates and interpretations surrounding specific phrases or ideas within the passage.
- *Historical and Cultural Context Integration*: The chapter could be strengthened by exploring the historical and cultural context in which Paul wrote the passage. This includes considering potential influences on the apostle’s language, concepts from Greco-Roman philosophies, and Jewish traditions.
- *Theological Nuance*: While the discussion attempts to synthesize theological concepts, it is important to avoid imposing an overly rigid and reductionistic theological framework onto the biblical text. In this regard, the author’s proposed framework may not fully capture the nuances or original intent of the passage.
- *Literary Devices Exploration*: The discourse could delve deeper into the literary devices and rhetorical strategies Paul employed in this passage. Examples include parallelism, contrast, metaphor, and how these contribute to the overall meaning.

- *Practical Application Consideration*: While the chapter focuses on theological and conceptual aspects, exploring practical implications and applications for believers' lives and the life of the church could further enrich the presentation.

## Chapter 6 The Saving Relation: Union with Christ in Galatians 2

### Summary

THIS CHAPTER EXAMINES PAUL'S experiential language in Galatians 2:15–21 about believers being crucified with Christ and having him live in them. The author maintains that the passage depicts the reconstitution of the self through a relational union with Christ, which transcends previous sources of identity. From this perspective, transformation happens through participation in new interpersonal bonds centered on Christ's gift, rather than through individual self-mastery, as well as provides an alternative to more recent notions of the self as an autonomous, continuous ego. What follows is a breakdown of the main points.

- *Salvation by Faith Alone* (vv. 15–16): Paul emphasized that both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith in Christ, not by following religious edicts (i.e., Torah observance or works of the law). This concept forms the foundation for Christian unity, transcending ethnic or cultural backgrounds.
- *Death to the Law, New Life in Christ* (vv. 19–20): Paul described himself as having “died to the law” (meaning the Mosaic legal code no longer defined the apostle's identity and path to salvation). Through his crucifixion with Christ, a profound transformation occurred. Christ now lived within his bondservant, becoming the source of his new identity.
- *Intersubjective Transformation* (vv. 19–20): Paul went beyond a simple change of beliefs. He suggested a deeper shift in how the self is constituted. The “I” is fundamentally remade through its ongoing relationship with the indwelling Christ, who becomes the source of faith. This “intersubjective” concept emphasizes that the believers' identity is shaped by their relationships, particularly with Christ.
- *Two Realms of Existence* (v. 20): Paul contrasted two ways of living: “in the flesh” and “in/by faith.” Life “in the flesh” refers to the believers' earthly desires and motivations. Life “in/by faith” is a new reality that Christ's sacrificial love generates. These two realms of existence create a continuing push/pull force within believers.

- *Ongoing Transformation (v. 20)*: Living in both realities signifies that the new self in Christ is constantly challenged by the old patterns and desires (“the flesh”). This dynamic tension is part of the ongoing process of Christian transformation.
- *Faith as Relational, not Individualistic*: Paul challenged the idea of an independent, self-made faith. Instead, the apostle emphasized that faith is a gift, nurtured through the believers’ connection to Christ’s faithfulness displayed on the cross.
- *Relational View of Selfhood*: This passage promotes a relational view of believers. Their identities are not fixed but constantly shaped by the bonds they form. These bonds can be positive (like union with Christ) or negative (like dependence on the law or unhealthy relationships).
- *Remade at the Core*: Paul’s imagery suggests that believers are fundamentally transformed through their relationship with Christ. This new identity is not superficial but goes to the core of who they are. It is a gift that pulls them towards God’s future plans.

### Potential Strengths

- *Clear Emphasis on Justification by Faith*: The chapter highlights that Paul’s primary argument in this passage is the doctrine of justification by faith alone, not by carrying out pious deeds or adhering to the Mosaic Law. This principle forms the bedrock of Christian theology, distinguishing it from other belief systems.
- *Vivid Metaphors*: The discourse notes that Paul employs vivid metaphors, such as “dying to the law” and being “crucified with Christ,” to convey the profound transformation that occurs in a believer’s life through faith in Christ.
- *Intersubjective Transformation*: The chapter stresses the way the passage highlights the idea of an “intersubjective” transformation, where the self is remade through the ongoing relationship with the indwelling Christ. This concept emphasizes the relational nature of personal identity and faith.
- *Two Realms of Existence*: The discourse spotlights Paul’s contrast between living “in the flesh” and living “in/by faith.” In turn, this emphasis offers a framework for understanding the ongoing dynamic tension and transformation that believers experience as they navigate these two realms of existence.
- *Relational View of Selfhood*: The chapter clarifies how the passage promotes a relational view of personhood, where identities are shaped

by the bonds believers form, particularly with Christ. This perspective challenges individualistic notions of faith and self.

- *Ongoing Transformation*: The discourse indicates how Paul acknowledged the ongoing transformation process in the Christian life, especially by recognizing that the new self in Christ is constantly challenged by the old patterns and desires (“the flesh”).

### Potential Areas for Improvement

- *Complexity of Metaphors*: While Paul’s metaphors are vivid, they may also be challenging for some readers to fully grasp, especially those unfamiliar with the cultural and religious context of the time. The chapter could benefit from more work in this area.
- *Apparent Contradiction*: The passage presents an apparent contradiction between living “in the flesh” and living “in/by faith,” which could be confusing or misinterpreted as promoting a dualistic or gnostic worldview. Further exploration and elaboration would strengthen this section of the chapter.
- *Lack of Practical Application*: While the passage offers a rich theological framework, it may benefit from more explicit guidance on how to apply these principles in daily life and navigate the tension between the two realms of existence. This aspect of the chapter requires additional attention and development.
- *Potential for Misinterpretation*: Some concepts, such as “dying to the law” and the role of the Mosaic legal code, could be misunderstood or taken to extremes, leading to potential misinterpretations or imbalances in Christian doctrine and practice. Expanding upon the discussion in this area would enhance the chapter’s depth and clarity.
- *Cultural and Contextual Limitations*: The passage is rooted in a specific cultural and historical context, which may limit its immediate relevance or accessibility to some contemporary readers or cross-cultural audiences. More comprehensive coverage is needed to address this issue fully within the chapter.
- *Potential for Oversimplification*: The passage presents a complex and nuanced relational view of selfhood, and there is a risk of oversimplifying or misunderstanding the interplay between individual agency and the transformative power of relationships. Greater detail and analysis are warranted to improve this portion of the chapter.

## Conclusion:

# Pushing the Reset Button on Paul's Anthropology

## Summary

THE AUTHOR CONTENDS THAT a fresh perspective is needed on Paul's view of human existence ("anthropology") and personhood. This reframing centers on a "second-person hermeneutic," particularly by emphasizing that people are fundamentally defined by their relationships with others. This approach challenges the prevailing Western conception of personal identity as a self-contained individual.

The author maintains that for Paul, sin is not merely a matter of individual choices. It is also a powerful social force that distorts our understanding of ourselves and our connections with others. Redemption, then, is liberation from this distorting power. It is a move towards a new life where believers are united with Christ through the Spirit and participate in a shared existence. This emphasis on participation is central to Paul's thought, portraying individuals as "selves-in-relation."

The author claims that the above perspective aligns with some contemporary theories. These argue that individuals are shaped through embodied interactions with their environment. The author goes further, bringing Paul into conversation with both the Stoic philosopher Epictetus and contemporary philosophical and scientific thought. This "three-way conversation" has the potential to open new avenues for articulating Paul's message (the gospel) in the current cultural context prevalent in the global North.

## Key Theological Implications

- *Dignity Through Participation*: Our personhood is a divinely bestowed gift grounded in Christ's taking on human form. It is not dependent on our individual traits or abilities. This radically affirms the inherent worth of every human being.
- *Transformation through Community*: Personal growth occurs through the quality of our relationships within a community that embodies Christ's teachings. Individual willpower plays a role, yet it is not the sole driver.
- *Interconnectedness and Hope*: Given our fundamental interconnectedness, complete wholeness or resolution is not attainable in this life. However, there is profound hope rooted in our ultimate identity in Christ, revealed through the concept of the "eschaton" (end times).
- *Fresh Frameworks for Understanding*: The author advocates for further exploration of this "participatory anthropology" across various disciplines, including race, ethics, healthcare, trauma studies, and philosophy of mind. Paul's thought, reinterpreted through this lens, offers fresh frameworks for understanding human identity, suffering, and how we can truly flourish.



## Potential Strengths

- *Rethinking Pauline Anthropology*. The author offers a fresh and thought-provoking approach to Pauline anthropology, contesting the prevalent Western notion of the self as an isolated entity.
- *Relational Ontology in Pauline Thought*: The author emphasizes the primacy of relationships and interconnectedness in Paul's view of human existence, aligning with contemporary trends in philosophy and science.
- *Multidimensional Dialogue*: The author skillfully establishes a "three-way conversation" by integrating Paul's ideas with thinkers like Epictetus and embodied cognition theories, fostering new avenues for interpreting the gospel in today's context.
- *Theological Perspectives on Human Flourishing*: The outlined theological implications, including dignity through participation, community-driven transformation, and interconnectedness fostering hope, offer profound insights into human identity, personal development, and our ultimate purpose.
- *The Case for Participatory Anthropology*: The author advocates for a broader exploration of this "participatory anthropology" across various disciplines, especially by highlighting its potential to illuminate diverse topics like race, ethics, healthcare, trauma studies, and the philosophy of mind.

## Potential Areas for Improvement

- *Need for Stronger Textual Evidence in Pauline Relational Theology*: Although the author convincingly argues for a relational and participatory view in Pauline thought, the treatise would benefit from more specific textual evidence and exegesis to substantiate the author's claims.
- *Expanding on the Connection Between Paul's Participatory Philosophy and Embodied Cognition Theories*: The link between Paul's emphasis on participation and contemporary theories of embodied cognition deserves further elaboration, as the current treatment tends to be brief.
- *Considering Further the Potential Challenges of Participatory Anthropology*: The author could delve deeper into potential tensions or challenges this participatory anthropology may encounter when interacting with other theological or philosophical frameworks.
- *Providing Additional Concrete Examples Across Disciplines*: While the author mentions implications for various disciplines, the treatise could offer additional concrete examples or suggestions for how this perspective could be applied or investigated within those specific fields.

- *Doing More to Address Potential Critiques and Limitations*: To provide a more nuanced perspective, the essay could explore potential critiques or alternative interpretations of Paul’s anthropology, especially by acknowledging and addressing counterarguments or limitations of the proposed participatory framework.

## Overall Assessment of the Author’s Treatise

IN STEPPING BACK FROM the preceding summary, analysis, and critique of the author’s treatise, the following overall assessment is offered.

To begin, the author offers an innovative, interdisciplinary exploration of Pauline anthropology, particularly by emphasizing the primacy of relationships in shaping human identity through a reader-response hermeneutic. By engaging thinkers like Epictetus (e.g., the Stoic view of the self) and contemporary theories of embodied cognition, the author skillfully constructs a “three-way conversation” that potentially sheds new light on Paul’s portrayal of the self. This self is deeply embedded within cosmic forces (both positive and negative) and fundamentally constituted through participation in Christ.

A particular strength of the author’s treatise lies in its thoughtful exegesis of key Pauline passages, such as Romans 7, Philippians 2, and Galatians 2. The author’s analysis not only elucidates Paul’s metaphorical language and theological concepts but also draws insightful connections to ancient perspectives on the body and modern philosophical frameworks. For instance, the discussion in Romans 7 of sin as a personified, invasive force colonizing the self resonates with both ancient models of disease and contemporary therapeutic ideas about internalized relational patterns distorting the self.

Moreover, in Philippians 2, the author adeptly navigates complex theological terrain, especially by unpacking intricate concepts like the two natures of Christ (i.e., the “hypostatic union”) and reciprocal participation. By highlighting Christ’s incarnation as a transformative act that reshapes human agency and identity through a participatory relationship with God, the author seeks to demonstrate the centrality of this “intersubjective” perspective in Pauline thought.

While the author’s treatise is commendable in its scope and depth, opportunities remain for further development. One area that could be strengthened is providing more explicit textual support and exegetical engagement, particularly in instances where the author makes broader claims about Paul’s participatory anthropology. Additionally, directly acknowledging and engaging with potential tensions, critiques, or alternative interpretations within scholarly discourse could lend greater nuance and balance to the analysis.

Furthermore, while the author outlines the theological implications of this participatory framework, such as dignity through participation and community-driven transformation, the treatise could benefit from a more detailed exploration of practical applications across various disciplines. Concrete examples or suggestions for how this perspective might inform or challenge approaches within fields like ethics, healthcare, trauma studies, or philosophy of mind would further highlight the relevance and potency of the author's proposed hermeneutic.

Overall, the author presents a distinctive perspective on Pauline anthropology. The treatise invites readers to reimagine the self, not as an isolated entity, but as a relational, participatory being whose identity is shaped through embodied connections—most profoundly, through the believers' transformative union with Christ. Admittedly, while opportunities exist for further refinement and expansion, the author's interdisciplinary approach and emphasis on the primacy of relationships offer a unique heuristic lens through which to engage Paul's enduring message.

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## Note

1. The Logos Research Edition of *Paul and the Person* was used for this book review.