This is the second edition of a work first published in 2000, distinguished from its predecessor by additional material in four chapters, slight revisions throughout, updated bibliographies, and questions for further study attached at the end of each chapter. Granting that a number of “hugely valuable” introductory works on Paul have recently been written, the author claims a unique place for his book as an introduction to the study of Paul (i.e., “to the range of approaches, perspectives, issues and debates in the scholarly study of Paul” [ix]) rather than to Paul himself. In fact, he has provided an admirable introduction to both.

Chapter 1 comments on Paul’s “enormous” influence, how contemporary concerns affect readings of his epistles, the distance between Paul’s world and our own, and the resources available for studying the apostle (the primary evidence of the undisputed epistles; the secondary, not unproblematic, yet “essential” evidence of Acts; other materials that illuminate the context in which Paul lived). Chapter 2 looks at pre-Pauline Christianity. It begins with the evidence of Acts, treating different views of its historicity and of its division between “Hebrews” and “Hellenists.” Turning to Paul’s own letters, Horrell notes Paul’s insistence that the message he proclaimed was also that of the other apostles, the evidence for Paul’s familiarity with Jesus traditions, and debates about the presence of
pre-Pauline formulae in the epistles. Chapter 3 sketches what we can know about Paul’s life and raises the questions whether he experienced a “call” or a “conversion” and whether his “distinctive theology” was formulated in the immediate wake of that experience or during the course of his activities as a missionary. The summary of Paul’s missionary career that follows includes a discussion of issues related to both relative and absolute chronology. Brief summaries of the content of each of the undisputed letters are given in chapter 4, and a few words are said comparing the structure of Paul’s letters with that of other letters of his day and with “the conventions established in Greco-Roman rhetoric and in more sophisticated styles of letter-writing” (51). On the latter point, the studies of H. D. Betz on Galatians and Margaret Mitchell on 1 Corinthians are given special attention, as well as the doubts of some scholars whether categories derived from ancient rhetoric are appropriately applied to Paul’s writings.

Chapter 5, the longest chapter in the book, takes a look at “Paul the Theologian.” In addition to a treatment of standard topics (e.g., Paul’s Christology, sacrificial and participationist understandings of Christ’s death, eschatology, Paul’s language of righteousness, the ambiguity of his references to “the faith of Jesus Christ,” and Paul’s ethics), Horrell discusses proposals to approach the shape of Paul’s theology as a narrative and different views of the role played by the Jewish scriptures in Paul’s arguments. Chapter 6 considers Paul’s view of the Jewish law, summarizing in some detail both sides of the “New Perspective” debate and different understandings of what, according to Paul, will become of Israel. Social-scientific approaches to the study of Paul are introduced in chapter 7. Attention is given to the social level of Paul’s converts, to the character of the communities he founded and their leadership, and to political readings of Paul. A discussion of feminist approaches follows, focusing in part on the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in part on texts that have played a crucial role in the debate (e.g., Rom 16:7; 1 Cor 7; 11:2–16; 14:34–35). Chapter 8 examines Paul’s “legacy” primarily by summarizing the content of the disputed epistles and debates about their authenticity; brief mention is also made of how Paul was used by gnostic groups, Marcion, and the “orthodox.” To fulfill all righteousness, Horrell then includes the obligatory brief reference to Augustine, Luther, Wesley, and Barth. The concluding chapter asks why it is worth our while to study Paul today.

Discussions throughout are clear and crisp. Diverse viewpoints are fairly presented, and Horrell is generally careful to point out how opposing views both find support in the primary sources. It is difficult to imagine how students could better be introduced to the discipline of Pauline scholarship.

Quibbles? One can always come up with a few. The claim that Pharisees in Paul’s day stood out for their “careful adherence to both written and oral Torah” (27) may be
allowed to stand in a work of this sort, since the “traditions” of the Pharisees were certainly distinguished from Scripture. But the terminology of “written” and “oral Torah” seems not to have developed until later.

Horrell’s treatment of “the language of justification” (75–77) seems a fair summary of recent discussions; his own views are presumably indicated on page 59, when he sums up the point of Rom 3:21–28 and Gal 2:16 by saying that “it is through Jesus Christ … that people can stand as members of the righteous covenant people of God.” Given that I have gone on record with my doubts that Paul means “belonging to the covenant people of God” when he writes “righteous,” I must at least raise a query: Is the notion of membership in the covenant people not foreign to such key “righteousness” texts as Rom 2:13 (see 2:4–16); 4:6–8; 5:16–19; 2 Cor 3:9; 5:21; or, for that matter, 1 Cor 4:4? And if so, why is it imported in Rom 3:21–28 and Gal 2:16?

Horrell is among the many who tell us that “some time after Paul’s death,” “Christianity … became a separate religion from Judaism” (89). I am sure I agree, but—in the absence of any definition of what is meant by “Christianity,” “religion,” and “Judaism”—I am not at all sure what it is I am agreeing with.

Students reading the book may, I think, be forgiven if they come away thinking that scholarship on Paul is written only in English and that scholars disagree on just about everything. (That suggestions for further reading are confined to studies in English is, of course, entirely appropriate in a book of this kind.) The first impression is both unfortunate and misleading; the second is unfortunate.

It struck this reader at least as curious that reasons for studying Paul today form the substance of the concluding rather than an introductory chapter. It struck me as interesting that, among the reasons given, the author mentions what has motivated the overwhelming majority of Paul’s readers, today as for two millennia, only at the end of his discussion of the third explanation and without broaching the subject what difference it makes if one approaches Paul as an apostle rather than as a genius (a “religious genius” [1], to be sure, of unquestioned historical importance and occasional literary flair, etc.). The question ought, one would think, to be of interest to students of religion.

The book does what it sets out to do extremely well. I am myself somewhat loath to endorse Mark Goodacre’s recommendation, cited on the cover of the book, to put “other books on Paul to one side and begin here.” But students for whom this textbook is assigned will undoubtedly be well served.