Research on Pauline eschatology over the last hundred years has been dominated by developmental theories that suggest a significant amount of diversity between Paul’s earlier and later letters. After reviewing these trends in Pauline eschatology, I point out particular elements of unity and diversity that have been suggested and argue that while we do find rhetorical diversity in Paul’s expression of his eschatological beliefs, resulting from various contextualizations of these beliefs to unique epistolary situations, a structural unity can nevertheless be detected; that is, although we cannot construct a comprehensive Pauline eschatology, we can track Paul’s pattern of accessing particular beliefs and see that it is adopted for context-specific rhetorical purposes along what seems to be a coherent eschatological framework organized according to three temporal frames of reference: past, present and future.

1. Trends in Pauline Eschatology

Like a number of other significant components of Pauline theology, contemporary approaches to Pauline eschatology are primarily developmental, positing successive stages in Paul’s eschatological beliefs either in contradiction or in tension with one another. Hegelian philosophy and several significant enlightenment advances paved the way for a series of developmental perspectives on dogmatics in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, seen in the work of Newman and Harnack, for example.\(^1\) As Longenecker notes, “the 1800s was

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a time when ideas of development and progress were ‘in the air.’” These models were applied to the origin and development of primitive Christian beliefs and tradition by a number of New Testament scholars, especially under the influence of the Tübingen school. Auguste Sabatier, however, was the first to apply a developmental scheme to Pauline theology, and Otto Pfleiderer, under the influence of Lüdemann and Baur, initiated the movement toward tracking development in Pauline eschatology. Pfleiderer argued that Paul’s shift in the structure of his eschatology was the result of his transition into a more Hellenistic mode of thinking as he gained greater exposure to Hellenistic literature in Alexandria. Pfleiderer was followed to varying degrees by a number of German scholars, including Ernst von Teichmann, Heinrich Holtzmann, Hans Windisch and Bernhard Weiss, to name a few of the more significant figures. Similar developments also emerged in English-language scholarship, seen, for example, in the work of J. B. Lightfoot, George Gilbert, George Matheson, R. H. Charles, Henry

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5 See esp. O. Pfleiderer, *Das Urchristentum, seine Schriften und Lehren in geschichtlichen Zusammenhang* (Berlin: Reimer, 1887), 293–98. I have argued elsewhere, however, that the most adequate chronology for Paul’s life probably best reflects a shift from more Hellenistic structures of thought, gained from Hellenistic education in Tarsus, to a more Jewish emphasis gained from rabbinical training instead of vice versa. See A. W. Pitts, “Hellenistic Schools in Jerusalem and Paul’s Rhetorical Education,” in S. E. Porter (ed.), *Paul’s World* (PAST 4; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 19–50.