

New Testament Theology

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Class Goals and Objectives

Our goal in this course, simply put, is to understand the basic theological message of the New Testament both in its diversity of expression and in its fundamental conceptual unity. To accomplish this goal, the course will pursue three objectives. We will begin by laying a historical and philosophical foundation for our understanding of the theology of the New Testament. We will then examine the major theological themes of the three parts of the New Testament canon. We will, finally, study the theological themes that bind the entire New Testament together as a conceptually unified book.

Suggested Textbooks

The Bible (more literal version)

Hengel, Martin. *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ*. Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2000.

Marshall, I. Howard. *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2004.

Thielman, Frank. *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Account*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005.

Westerholm, Stephen. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004.

Wilken, Robert L. *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*. New York: Yale University Press, 1984.

Introduction

Foundations for the Study of New Testament Theology

I. The History of New Testament Theology as a Discipline: Biblical theology as a product of the Reformation

- A. Luther
- B. Melancthon
- C. Protestant Scholasticism
- D. Two developments, however, worked against this tendency:
 1. German Pietism
 2. English (and German) Rationalism
 3. The first Biblical theologies and the first New Testament theologies.
 - a. Gotthilf Traugott Zachariä (1729—1777)
 - b. Georg Lorenz Bauer (1755—1806)

II. The Legitimacy of New Testament Theology as a Discipline: Three Figures and Two Issues

- A. Three important historical figures and their ideas.
 1. Johann Philipp Gabler (1787)
 2. William Wrede (1897)
 3. Heikki Räisänen (1990, 2000)
- B. The Common Ground...
 1. Beneath Gabler, Wrede, and Räisänen
 2. Beneath Wrede and Räisänen
- C. How Can Christians Who Believe in Special Revelation Respond to the Criticisms of Gabler, Wrede, and Räisänen?

1. The issue of the canon.
2. The issue of presuppositions.
3. The issue of theological diversity.
 - a. Diversity as a problem
 - b. The “canon within the canon” approach.
 - c. Why this approach will not work

Gospels

Emergence of the Fourfold Gospel

I. The Problem of Four Diverse Gospels

- A. All claim to be the one gospel of Jesus Christ
- B. All diverge from one another in various ways. Examples:
 1. The passion narrative
 2. The resurrection narrative
 - a. Kelsus
 - b. Porphyry

II. Efforts to Solve the Problem by Adopting a Single Gospel

- A. The focus on one gospel: Marcion
- B. Efforts to harmonize the four gospels
 1. Justin
 2. Theophilus of Antioch
 3. Tatian
- C. Efforts to smooth over the differences

Early Church Acceptance of the Four Gospels as Authoritative

I. The Response of the Early Church

- A. The response itself
- B. The reasons for this response
 1. The importance of truthful history and the widely acknowledged antiquity of the four gospels.
 - a. Justin Martyr
 - b. Quotations and Allusions to the Four
 - c. Apocryphal Gospel Titles
 - i. *Gospel of Peter*
 - ii. *Gospel of Thomas*
 2. The unity of the four gospels on the fundamental principles of the one gospel
 - a. Evidence that early Christians agreed on the one gospel
 - i. Evidence from 1 Thessalonians
 - ii. Evidence from Galatians
 - b. Evidence from the titles of the gospels
 - c. Explicit evidence from the second and third centuries
 - i. Muratorian canon
 - ii. Irenaeus
 - a) The one gospel in four
 - b) The importance of Acts
 - iii. Origen
 3. The theological point of a pluriform witness

- a. A pluriform witness prevents erroneous overemphasis on a certain theological themes to the exclusion of others.
- b. The pluriform nature of the gospel record itself witnesses to the grandeur of the one gospel.

II. The Relevance of the Early Church's Approach to the Modern and Post-Modern Quest for the Historical Jesus

- A. The importance of history, then and now
- B. The importance of the fourfold witness to Jesus, then and now

The Theological Emphases of the Four Gospels

I. What is the historical significance of Jesus?

- A. The two-tiered approach of John, Matthew, and Mark
 - 1. John
 - 2. Mark

I. What is the historical significance of Jesus?

- A. The two-tiered approach of John, Matthew, and Mark
 - 1. John
 - 2. Mark
 - 3. Matthew
- B. The different approach of Luke-Acts

II. Why did the Jewish leadership reject him?

- A. Scripture had to be fulfilled
- B. The wickedness of those who rejected him
- C. Claim by some scholars that John's gospel has a dualistic emphasis
 - 1. Misreading John's Version of the Rejection of Jesus—John chapter 8
 - 2. John chapter 6

III. What is the meaning of his death?

- A. Atonement in Matthew and Mark
- B. The path back to the full glory of the Father (John)
- C. A necessary step toward exaltation and mission (Luke-Acts)

IV. What response should Jesus receive in the present?

- A. Persevering faith and love for fellow Christians (John)
- B. Certainty of conviction despite social ostracism (Luke-Acts)
- C. Repentance and faith in light of failure and atonement (Mark)
- D. Acceptance rather than rejection (Matthew)

Paul

The Nature of Paul's Theology

I. Introduction

II. Two issues have dominated the study of Paul's theology.

- A. The issue of Paul's coherence (and significance): *three positions*

1. Paul as the Prince of Theologians
 2. Paul as a Developing Theologian
 3. Paul as a Religious Mystic
- B. The issue of the “center” of Paul’s theology
1. Is talk of a “center” to Paul’s theology helpful?
 2. What center should we choose? Two cautions
 3. A proposal for the “center” of Paul’s theology

Theological Themes in Paul's Letters

I. Introduction

- A. Review
- B. The plan or considering Paul’s theology synthetically
 1. Five recurring themes
 2. Three fundamental convictions out of which Paul’s response to these five problems arises:

II. Theme 1: Perseverance in the Midst of Persecution

- A. From the very first, Christians in the Roman empire were persecuted because of the threat that their religious convictions were thought to bring to social stability.
- B. Paul’s Response to the Problem of Perseverance in the Face of Persecution (1 Thessalonians 1:1–10)
 1. Identity formation
 2. The coming of the Day of the Lord
 3. Imitation of the Examples of Those Who Have Suffered and Remained Faithful

III. Theme 2: The Witness of the Church to the Unbelieving World

- A. Paul was also interested in the witness of the church to the unbelieving world.
- B. The theme is most prominent in the Pastoral Letters
 1. 1 Timothy
 2. Titus 2:1–10
- C. Does the prominence of the theme in the Pastorals mean that the Pastorals come from a post-Pauline era of concern with *christliche Bürgerlichkeit*?

IV. Theme 3: The Sanctity of the Church

- A. The vocation of God’s ancient people Israel
- B. Paul believed that this time of restoration had come with the coming of Christ
- C. The church should separate itself from the nations by means of a law.
 1. Not the law of Moses
 2. Nevertheless, including
 - a. The ten commandments
 - b. The love commandment
 3. This is probably what Paul would call “the law of Christ”
 4. Differences between “the law of Moses” and “the law of Christ”

V. Theme 4: The Unity of the Church

- A. The extent of the problem
 1. Disunity in Corinth
 2. Disunity in Galatia
 3. Disunity in Philippi
 4. Disunity in Romans

- B. The theology of Paul's solution
 1. The gift-character of salvation
 2. The church's responsibility to "edify" others

VI. Theme 5: The Preservation of the Church from Theological Error

- A. The Nature of the Final Day
 1. The Resurrection
 2. The Imminence of the End
- B. The Criterion for Acquittal in God's Court
 1. Galatians, Philippians, and Romans focus on the criterion for entry into the eschatologically restored people of God.
 2. What does Paul's justification language mean?
 3. How does "justification by faith in Christ's death and through God's grace" answer the problem in Galatia and the position of the unbelieving Jewish interlocutor in Romans?
- C. The Relationship between the Visible and Invisible Worlds
 1. Colossians
 2. Ephesians
 3. Pastoral epistles

VII. The Basic Structure of Paul's Theology

- A. The centrality of Christ in the restoration of creation
- B. The comprehensiveness and seriousness of human sin.
- C. The lavish response of God's grace

General Epistles

The Unity and Theological Value of Hebrews to Revelation

I. Is it legitimate to examine the last nine books of the New Testament together?

- A. The homogeneity of the other two parts of the New Testament canon
- B. The diversity of the books
 1. Diversity of authors
 2. Diversity of genres
- C. Organizational schemes that fail
 1. A scheme from the early church
 2. "Early Catholicism"

II. Another possibility: the orthodox response to false teaching and persecution

- A. The church's response to false teaching
 1. Unhealthy theological developments of the Pauline tradition
 2. Unhealthy theological developments of the Johannine tradition
- B. The common ground between these two types of false teaching: An over emphasis on knowledge and an under emphasis on ethics

III. The church's response

- A. The false teachers have departed from historically reliable Christian tradition.
- B. That tradition stresses the crucial link between Christian confession and ethics.
- C. That tradition stresses the reality of a coming Day of Judgment in which the wicked will be judged.

IV. The church's response to persecution

- A. Why were the early Christians persecuted?
- B. Alternative answers to five crucial questions.
 1. Who is Jesus?
 2. Who are Christians?
 3. Who are the opponents of God's people?
 4. What is the significance of Christian suffering?
 5. What does the future hold?

Conclusion and Summary

The Unified Theological Witness of the New Testament

I. The Significance of Jesus

- A. Jesus as More than Messiah
- B. Universal Rebellion as the Reason for Jesus' Rejection
- C. The Death of Jesus as the Defeat of Rebellion against God
 1. Jesus' Death Atones for Human Sin
 2. Jesus' Death Defeats the Malevolent Powers

II. Faith as the Response to God's Gracious Initiative

- A. Faith's Focus on God
- B. Faith's Eschatological Character
- C. Faith as Obedience

III. The Spirit as the Eschatological Presence of God

- A. The Spirit's Presence in the Life of Jesus
- B. The Spirit's Presence with God's People
 1. Empowering the Church's Witness
 2. Directing the Church
 3. Teaching the Church
 4. Dissolving Ethnic Barriers
 5. Sanctifying God's People

IV. The Church as the People of God

- A. The Church as the Restored Israel
- B. The Church as the Dwelling Place of God's Presence
- C. The Church as the Repository of Truth

V. The Consummation of All Things

- A. What Will the New Creation Be?
- B. When Will the New Creation Come?
- C. How Should Hope for the New Creation Influence Christian Behavior?