#### **Myanmar Institute of Theology**

# NT 301: New Testament Theology Edition 4.1

### **TEACHING NOTES**

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#### Week 1—Course Overview

#### Warm Greeting and Introduction

#### **Course Description**

This course focuses on how to do theology using the New Testament as the starting point for doctrine, spirituality, and ethics. We will explore both the unity and diversity found among major NT writers, and seek to identify dominant theological messages that have endured the test of time and dissemination in a wide variety of cultures and contexts. This course helps students develop a solid New Testament foundation for a lifetime of Christian service as preachers, teachers, other kinds of ministers, and representatives of Christianity in inter-faith dialogue.

#### **Course Objectives**—Students will...

- 1. understand the key issues and challenges involved in doing New Testament Theology (NTT),
- 2. learn the dominant theological messages of the New Testament, and be able to discuss the unity and diversity to be found among major NT writers,
- 3. grasp the significance of the New Testament and Christian spirituality for addressing contextual social issues in Myanmar, such as poverty, injustice, discrimination, oppression, and suffering,
- 4. be able to articulate how New Testament theologies inform the modern debate on exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism; and the implications of students' conclusions for evangelism and inter-faith dialogue, and
- 5. reflect on how to present a coherent Gospel message and practical Christian teaching within the context of a local church, rooted in the New Testament and relevant to their particular context.

In seminary, students take apart the "engine" of their faith, to examine the parts, see how it functions, and compare it to other religious and spiritual engines. When it comes time to go back home, students also need to be able to put the engine back together again (in one form or another) so that they have something that "runs" to use in the context of church and ministry! This course is intended to help with both taking apart the Scriptures and to putting them back together again so that it is useful for the student's personal life as well as for their future ministry in the church.

#### **Course Requirements**

- 1. Attend class regularly. Students missing more than one class in the semester will be penalized.
- 2. Read assigned texts for course. 25% of grade.
  - a. Biblical texts (20 New Testament biblical books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation).
  - b. Read following secondary texts:
    - 1) NTT Student Guide

- 2) Dan O. Via, *What Is New Testament Theology?* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 2002.
- 3) Frank Matera, New Testament Theology—assigned texts

#### Report on Bible and secondary source reading due: Friday, March 1, 2019

- 3. Mid-Term Exam. 25% of grade Wednesday, December 12, 2018
- 4. Submit a 10-12 page research and integrative paper (See instruction sheet for guidelines) 50% of grade
  - a. Proposal (thesis, outline, bibliography) due on Wednesday, October 31 (8:00 a.m.)
  - b. Final paper due on Thursday, February 14, 2018 (4:00 p.m.)

#### **Schedule of Topics**

- Week 1 Introduction to Doing New Testament Theology *Matera*, *xix-xxxi*; *Via*, 7-57 (first week)
- Weeks 2-6 Paul: Christian Living Through the Risen Christ *Matera*, 99-258 (over five weeks)
  - 1. Paul: issues in interpretation, core, new perspective
  - 2. Romans—Paul's theological masterpiece
  - 3. Philippians—Citizens of Heaven
  - 4. Synthesis of Paul's theology
  - 5. Evolution of Paul's theology and those who followed him
- Weeks 7-9 The Synoptic Gospels: Christianity and Jesus of Nazareth *Matera, 1-98 (over three weeks)* 
  - 1. Mark
  - 2. Matthew
  - 3. Luke and Acts as Theology

#### **Mid-Term Exam**

Week 10 John: Jesus the Incarnate Son of God

*Matera, 259-332 (one week)* 

- 1. The Highest NT Christology
- 2. Soteriology, Discipleship, and Eschatology in John
- Week 11 Christian Faith in an Explicitly Jewish Context

*Matera, 333-371 (one week)* 

- 1. Hebrews and the OT Theological foundation for NT Theology
- 2. James (with Matthew)
- Week 12 New Testament Theology Amid Persecution and Suffering

*Matera*, *372-422* (one week)

- 1. 1-2 Peter
- 2. Revelation
- Week 13 New Testament Theology: Unity Amid Diversity

Matera, 423-480

Week 14 Tensions and Challenges in Doing New Testament Theology

Catch up on Bible and text book reading

Week 15 Theologizing and Preaching the Gospel in Pluralistic Contexts

Catch up on Bible and text book reading

Week 16 Hermeneutics and Contextualization

Via, 59-132

#### **Required Texts (on reserve in the library)**

- Dunn, James. D. G. New Testament Theology: An Introduction. Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2009.
- Matera, Frank J. New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity. Louisville, London, Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.
- Via, Dan O. (2002) What Is New Testament Theology? Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 2002.

## Other Recommended Bibliographical Resources (on Dr. Tim's reserve shelf in library)

- Bultmann, Rudolf. Theology of the New Testament. New York: Scribners, 1951-55.
- Fee, Gordon and D. Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd Ed. Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1981, 1993, 2003.
- Flemming, Dean. Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Gorman, Michael J. Reading Paul. Eugene, Oregon, Cascade Books, 2008.
- Helseth, P. K., W. L. Craig, et al. *Four Views on Divine Providence*. Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2011.
- Horton, M. S., M. F. Bird, et al. *Justification: Five Views*. Downers Grove, Illinois, Intervarsity Press, 2011.
- Jesus through Asian Eyes: Frequently Asked Questions About Jesus, Life and Faith in God. Czech Republic: The Good Book Company Ltd., 2014.
- Walter C. Kaiser, J., D. L. Bock, et al. *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2008.
- Porter, Stanley E. *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2016.
- Ramsey, Michael. *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009. (Reprint of 1935 original edition.)
- Wright, N. T.). Evil and the Justice of God. Downers Grove, IL, Inter-Varsity Press, 2006.
- Yarbrough, Robert W. *The Salvation Historical Fallacy? Reassessing the History of New Testament Theology*. History of Biblical Interpretation, edited by Robert Morgan. Leiden: Deo, 2004.
- Yinger, K. L. The New Perspective on Paul: An Introduction. Eugene, OR, Cascade, 2011.

#### 1.2-3 Introduction to Doing New Testament Theology

Task, method, assumptions, and issues

- A. The actual work of doing biblical theology is tricky, because how you define the task, method, and assumptions will greatly affect your conclusions.<sup>1</sup>
  - 1. Is it primarily a study of what was believed by first century Christians? (Stendahl)
  - 2. Is it an analysis of early Christian beliefs, which flowed or deviated from the theological views of their Jewish predecessors? (Dunn)
  - 3. Is the historical study intended to provide a starting place for Christian theology, or an authoritative word that can challenge modern thought? (Robinson)
  - 4. Do we study the ancient text to identify the existential messages that are still relevant today, irrespective of their original mythological containers? (Bultmann)
  - 5. Do we start with modern day ideologies, philosophies, and theologies, and then enter into a dialogue with biblical texts and teaching? (E.g., liberation theology, feminism, Minjung theology, Dalit theology, et al.)
- B. Key issues
  - 1. What are the appropriate sources for doing NT theology?
  - 2. Should narratives and teachings be taken literally or symbolically?
  - 3. The importance of differentiating between descriptive and prescriptive texts.
  - 4. To what extent does the original context shape or limit the authority of the texts for us today?

The role of the Bible for doing theology

- A. The importance of identifying our sources for theological reflection
  - 1. Methodologically, to do theology, theologians must decide where they will look for their ideas about God. Options include: sacred texts, personal or communal experience, philosophy, great religious figures, gurus and spiritual teachers, imagination or speculation, nature, science, music, drugs, or some other source that they deem informative, reliable, or even authoritative. Everyone has ideas and opinions about God (theology). The question is, which of those ideas will you put your faith in? Are some ideas/opinions better than others? If so, why? In other words, how do you know if the theological idea you hear is a good one?
  - 2. For seminary education, then, it's not enough to hear different ideas (and there are many different theologies). Seminarians also must learn how to evaluate/critique various theologies and theological methods, starting with the sources of "knowledge" each one depends upon.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> For a more extensive outline and discussion of the relevant academic issues, see Appendix 1, "Foundational Issues in Doing New Testament Theology," in the Appendices section at the back.



- B. For the past 2000 years, Christians in every corner of the globe have looked to the Bible for the foundation of their theological beliefs.
  - 1. While there are many different post-modern theologies and alternative theological methods employed today, historically, Christian theologians have looked to the Bible as the *primary authoritative source* for what to believe about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Christian life (theological ideas and doctrine). That is, the Bible, Old Testament and New, provides the primary literary foundation for the Judeo-Christian tradition.
  - 2. Further, Christians over the centuries have also learned to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit to speak through these sacred writings in ways that personally touch, lead, and guide us as individuals, churches, and communities.
  - 3. Effective Christian ministry requires a thoroughgoing knowledge of the biblical texts, because most Christian communities are formed and nurtured by the teachings found in the Bible. Ministers need to grasp the theology expressed through these texts and as well as the implications for practical Christian living and Christian community.
- C. In other words, historically, Christians have relied extensively on the Old and New Testaments as the pre-eminent guide for their spiritual beliefs, community, and personal lives. The assumption behind this practice comes in part from the

words of the Apostle Paul, who wrote, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17, NRSV). He was probably speaking of the Old Testament when he wrote those words, but Christians over the centuries have found them to be true for the writings of the New Testament as well.

The Sacred Text—The "Inspired" Word of God

- A. What does it mean for a writing to be inspired?<sup>2</sup>
  - 1. Intuition Theory: Authors had natural insight or were religious geniuses.
  - 2. Illumination Theory: Holy Spirit heightened writing power of writers.
  - 3. Dynamic Theory: The writing combines divine and human inspiration; Holy Spirit directs writing, i.e., gives concepts, ideas, truths.
  - 4. Verbal Theory: the exact words directed by the Holy Spirit.
  - 5. Dictation Theory: God dictates exact words and peculiarities to each writer.
    - **Q.** What difference does it make which theory you believe? In other words, what is at stake in adopting a particular theory? (reliability of the teaching? Its authority? The relative spiritual value of the Bible in comparison to other sources of religious or spiritual teaching? Thus, how does your theory affect your degree of security, certainty, etc.?)
    - Q. Regardless of which theory you favor, if any, what do you expect to get from an inspired text? (Some communication from God about spiritual matters of significance. See 2 Tim. 3:15-17.) Which biblical texts are inspired—some or all? (See 2 Peter 1:20-21. When Peter spoke of the "prophecy of Scripture" was he speaking of the whole text or parts of the Bible?)
    - <u>Key</u>: Rather than worry about which theory is "correct" (since we can't prove the matter one way or the other), it is more important to focus on the <u>purpose(s)</u> of the texts and to develop a faith perspective on the role of the Bible in the development of your beliefs and spiritual practices.
- B. On the difference between academic and devotional readings of the Bible.

  Academics analyze the Bible to study what ancient writers said, believed, and practiced related to their faith. People of faith listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit to speak through the sacred text. They will ask themselves, "What is God trying to communicate to me and to us, through these words?" Seminary students are expected to develop their abilities to read the Bible from both perspectives, academic and devotional.

Context is important for doing New Testament Theology

At Myanmar Institute of Theology, we talk about the importance of doing "contextual theology." In the Biblical department, we focus on the importance of context both in understanding the original biblical texts and in interpreting it for today. Instead of naively

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> For a discussion of these various theories, see, Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*.

just reading the Bible and assuming that we know what it meant to the original readers or to us today, we do the following:

- 1. We study the writings of the Bible in their original contexts, in order to learn how the writers and original readers would have understood the ideas and types of writings found in the Bible.
- 2. We study the history of interpretation of biblical texts with an eye to the influence of various cultures, especially in the West, so that we can consider the contexts for historical interpreters alongside our contexts today. (E.g., Martin Luther's 16<sup>th</sup> century interpretation of Scripture was influenced by his context, in which the Roman Catholic Church had become corrupted and unduly emphasized works at the expense of God's grace and our response of faith.)
- 3. We study the religious, social, political, and ethical beliefs and issues found in various modern contexts (ethnic groups, cultures, nations, etc.), so that we might know better how the Gospel and theological messages of the Bible might be heard and understood when evangelizing and participating in inter-faith dialogue.
- 4. When possible, we try to identify how God has been at work in various cultures and settings prior to and/or separate from the preaching of the Gospel. We assume that each ethnic group, sub-ethnic group, and sub-sub-ethnic group or family has its own experience with God that can only be fully known and expressed in terms of each one's own language and experience. We do so in order to better recognize how God is at work in the world and to be more tolerant and even appreciative of differences among Christian believers, and even among believers in different religions.
- 5. Finally, in doing contextual theology we examine how beliefs about God and spirituality arise out of the experience of people in a particular context (e.g., liberation theology arose out of South America, where the poor were routinely suffering from oppression and economic injustice).

Professor Dean Flemming stated in his recent text book, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, "...in order for the Christian message to be meaningful to people it must come to them in language and categories that make sense within their particular culture and life situation. It must be contextualized. Contextualization has to do with how the gospel revealed in Scripture authentically comes to life in each new cultural, social, religious and historical setting."<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to doing New Testament Theology, then, context is important for understanding the biblical messages in their original contexts, for appreciating the wide variety of approaches to interpreting the Bible over the past 2000 years, and for wrestling with how to best interpret the Gospel and biblical teaching today.

Should we start with context or the Bible?

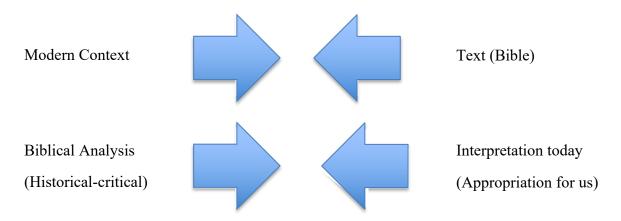
One of the goals of this course is to "grasp the significance of the New Testament and Christian spirituality for addressing contextual social issues in Myanmar, such as poverty,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005) 13-14.

injustice, discrimination, oppression, and suffering." Another goal pertains to how NT Theology informs our dialogue with Buddhists and our thoughts about exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. In other words, the modern context is important in this class.

However, where should one start in doing NT Theology: with the contextual issues or with the biblical text itself? Now, there is not one right answer to this question. Some of you might say we should start with today's context(s). Others will say, no, we should start with the Bible.

No matter where you think the starting place is, the truth is, we all start with today—with our experience, our thoughts, our feelings, our fears, our concerns, and our desires for a better life and a better world. Then we go to Scripture looking for answers. Scripture will then take us back to today, and today will take us back to Scripture. Back and forth we will go. That is what it means to do NT Theology, on an ongoing basis.<sup>4</sup>



However, methodologically, we can still choose an appropriate starting place *intellectually*. Scholars need to decide if it is best to try to start with the ancient text in its original context and then apply it to today, or if it is better to identify the needs, ideas, and values of a modern context and then go to Scripture.

Let me explain why we are going to start with the Bible in this class. The main reason is that we cannot talk intelligently about the relevance of the Bible for today without knowing what it really says as a collection of documents written in concrete historical settings with meaning and application for people who do not live in our modern settings. By reading the Bible with an eye to the original context, we are more likely to hear their voices and not exclude the many teachings that might not seem relevant to our modern contexts. Yet, because we cannot help but read the text (no matter how objective and scholarly we try to be) from our own unique perspectives, it becomes important that we

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> This "back and forth" process is related to what scholars call the "hermeneutical circle": the ongoing movement from text to context, context to text, text to context, etc. is similar to moving from presuppositions to analysis in an ongoing loop. See page 115 below for more on the hermeneutical circle.

share our various readings with one another. In this way, our voices can mingle with the ancient voices, and our study of Scripture can become richer and consciously influenced by both objective and subjective methodologies.

#### Theology or theologies?

Some scholars prefer to speak about NT theologies (plural). When someone says this, they are bringing attention to the fact that there are differences among writers. However, it is an open question whether or not these writers have a different view of God or of how you and I relate to this God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

My approach understands the theology of the NT as the theology of the Christian Church, rather than simply a collection of writings and theologies of different writers. In other words, we are not simply historical critics, examining each writer. We are assuming that the collection of 27 books has a coherency (unity), amidst diversity, which the early church affirmed. The NT is the canonical collection of texts that represent the faith of Jesus Christ and the apostles.

Thus, I retain the traditional term, New Testament Theology, as does nearly every scholar who writes on the subject. However, at the same time, I am going to expect students to look for theological tensions and differences among the various writers, and to learn how the writers' various contexts influenced what they wrote and how they expressed their theological views. Further, I will continually ask students to interact with what they are reading from the Biblical text in order to bring to bear your own voice, thoughts, experiences, questions, and insights.

In practice, each of us must do our own theological work and identify/create our own theology as individuals. Yet, based on the witness of the Church over time, this individual theological work is best done in the context of community, past and present. As Christians, the logical starting place is with the apostles and prophets whose voices we find in the New Testament, who themselves looked to the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) in helping them to form their theological views.

When we look at the texts as a whole, we can see overarching theological purposes of the canonical text:

- 1. To lift up the one true God, Creator and Father of humanity
  The purpose of the Old and New Testaments is first of all is to teach people
  about God, who is the Creator of the universe and the Father of Jesus Christ;
  and to lead readers to God, and motivate them to live in a proper relationship
  with God.
- 2. To present the person and work of Jesus Christ
  The New Testament focuses particularly on Jesus Christ, who is presented as
  the Savior of the world, the one to whom human beings who are in a right
  relationship with God owe their allegiance as their Lord (i.e., loving leader).
- 3. To present the person and work of the Holy Spirit

The theological message of the New Testament supports Trinitarian theology (developed in the centuries after the NT was written), because the teachings on God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ) are linked to teachings on the Holy Spirit, who is said to proceed from God the Father in order to serve God's purposes in the world and in the lives of followers of Christ. This Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of Christ. The Western Church confessed that the Spirit proceeds from Christ as well as from the Father, while the Eastern Church insists that the Spirit came from the Father alone. Either way, the Holy Spirit is part of the God-head.

4. To create communities of believers, who worship their creator, put their faith in Jesus Christ, and live Christ-centered, Spirit-led lives
In diverse manners, through different genres of literature, we can discern an ultimate purpose in the messages of the NT. That ultimate goal is to lead believers to true worship of God, to faith in and allegiance to Christ, and to a life filled with the Spirit and led by the Spirit. Thus, the biblical texts are intellectual, theological, transformative, and practical, both for the individual and for the community of believers. The desired outcome of the writings as a whole is that believers would devote their lives to knowing, loving, and serving God as their *raison d'être* (reason for living), or purpose in life.

Practical steps for doing New Testament Theology

The task of mastering the Bible is, in some ways, a life-long task. Every Christian has the responsibility of reading (if possible) and learning the stories and main content of the Bible over time. Pastors, teachers, and Christian leaders have additional responsibility that goes beyond learning the content. They must also be able to responsibly and intelligently interpret the Scriptures and know how to draw on them appropriately in doing theology and in ministering to others.

In seminary, students have already had an introduction to the New Testament course prior to this one. Now, in NT Theology, it is time to develop greater theological understanding of the various authors. Practically, this means that we will be focusing on the major teaching of the various biblical writers—how they would have been understood in their original contexts and how students hear and wrestle with their messages in today's context. In other words, we will be focusing on the various teachings in the New Testament about God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) and about our relationship to God and other Christians.

The starting place—Understand the flow from OT to NT and the "Theologizing" process

- A. James Dunn's approach
  - 1. Study writers
  - 2. Study themes
  - 3. Study movement from 2d Temple Judaism (516/530 BC AD 70, LXX, Old Testament apocrypha and pseudepigrapha) as seen in various NT writers
- B. "Determining Factors" in doing New Testament Theology (NTT)—3 Major Factors (Dunn)

- 1. The Old Testament (OT) is the essential theological backdrop to doing NTT. Christians must know the OT to do NTT. NT writers' use of the OT was the beginning of NT theologizing.
  - a. The OT and Judaism comprise the presupposition for NTT. All the writers of the NT either indicate a strong Jewish background or recognize the significance of Jesus' and Christianity's Jewish heritage, even if some NT writings betray little influence or reliance upon Jewish concepts (e.g., 1 Thess.). The Hellenistic background is also very significant (Bultmann et al.), with its philosophies, forms of thought, writing styles, and even religion (e.g., perhaps the belief in the immortality of the soul. Also, the Emperor cult and the many other local cults in Roman culture provide an important backdrop to some of Paul's letters, especially Philippians.)
  - b. C. H. Dodd called the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament "the substructure of New Testament theology."
  - c. James Dunn: The Old Testament should be understood as ongoing revelation, and thus essential for doing NT Theology (or, theologizing).

"The New Testament's use of the Old Testament has to be seen more as an engagement with the moving, developing traditions of thought and praxis expressed in and through these texts, always, of course, in light of the revelation the first Christians experienced through and in reference to Jesus the Christ" (p. 22).

In New Testament theologizing, the authors recognized the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures yet sought to understand the implications of the writings for their own day in new and fresh ways. Jesus and Paul were "part of the living flow of tradition engaging in the art of theologizing, which consists of wrestling with the proper understanding and proportions of Scripture in the changing circumstances of their time" (p. 22).

"Unless a NT theology both recognizes and brings out the degree to which the NT writers saw themselves as in continuity with the revelation of the OT and as at least in some measure continuing or completing that revelation, it can hardly provide a faithful representation of what they understood themselves to be about" (p. 23).

- 2. The Revelation of Jesus Christ—his life, mission, death, and resurrection provided the impetus to the writing of the NT documents.

  Dunn argues that "the most important determinative factor for NTT is Jesus, particularly the impact of his death and resurrection" (p. 24).
- 3. The Experience of the Spirit—the Christians' experience of God through the Holy Spirit was a second major development in the first century that greatly influenced the thinking and experience of early Christians. (pp. 32-37)
- C. The Central Subject Matter of a Biblical Theology.

"The structure and content of any NT biblical theology will be decided by the way the questions of continuity-discontinuity and unity-diversity are handled" (p. 38).

"The fundamental issue for a NT biblical theology is whether the message of Jesus or the gospel about Jesus introduced a radical disjuncture with these central features of what we may fairly call Israel's biblical theology" [God as one; how God saves; Israel, the elect nation; and the role of Torah, which tells how the people of God should live] (p. 38).

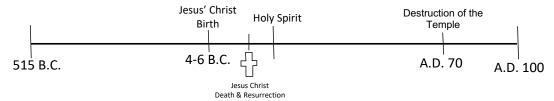
- D. Caveat: While the instructor agrees with Dunn that New Testament Theology must be written within the context of biblical theology, we must also recognize that the New Testament writers were strongly influenced by Hellenism and the Roman Empire as well as the Old Testament. How much so is a matter of debate.
- E. Dunn concludes his book by affirming that "theology" is really "theologizing" ("expressions of living theology"), something that took place over time while the New Testament books were being written and continues to take place today (and ever since the NT was written). It's not just something we learn, discuss, or imagine; it's something "we do". This makes our job exciting, he says. (Pp. 157-9)

Comment NT theology involves understanding the thinking and teaching of the NT writers in their original context and in light of how their thinking "theologizes" the faith they inherited from Judaism. We need to identify the diversity exhibited in the NT and the unity that emerges from both a study of the texts and a personal reflection on the theological message(s) based on our own experience. Doing NT theology then is a combination of analyzing the NT texts themselves, reflecting on the soil from which they came (employing historical critical methods), and making explicit the lines of connection between the ancient NT text and our own faith today. The latter is what is the most challenging for interpreters today.

Dunn's approach is practical and helpful as a way of understanding the need for ongoing interpretation and application of an inherited tradition. Dunn's approach also provides an important guideline for today: appropriate theologizing will maintain continuity between the major beliefs and themes from ancient Israel, the teachings of Jesus Christ, the beliefs of the early church, the theological reflections over the past 2000 years, and our experience today.

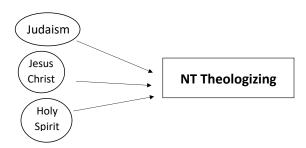
However, Dunn leaves open some important questions. What are the "rules," standards, safeguards, etc. to govern the practice of theologizing?

#### Major Influences on the Writing of the New Testament



#### **2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism** (515 B.C. – A.D. 70)

"OT, LXX, Apocrypha"



Conventional Paradigms for doing NT Theology (assuming an authoritative text)

- A. Separately from what James Dunn is emphasizing (i.e., identifying points of juncture and disjuncture from Second Temple Judaism of Jesus's day) one needs to decide between one of the following paradigms for doing New Testament theology:
  - 1. Approach 1: Utilize a systematic theological approach = synthesize all the main teachings of the NT in traditional theological categories: theology, Christology, pneumatology, soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and ethics.
  - 2. Approach 2: Read each NT writer, and let each one stand on his own, but in relationship to and in tension with all the other writers.
  - 3. Approach 3: Create an eclectic, "canon within a canon" based on criteria you believe are valid. (For example, you could focus on denominational emphases; the meaning of Jesus' life and message; justification by grace through faith; the life of faith; an existential interpretation of Scripture; or some other ideological lens through which you read, interpret and organize the meaning of the New Testament for today, e.g., liberation theology, feminist theology, ecological theology, etc.) Based on how you prioritize the various teachings of NT writers, and understand the best interpretation of the texts, you must answer: what is core, and what is marginal?
- B. Note: Each approach is problematic for different reasons.
  - 1. Approach 1 glosses over differences and tensions. E.g., Are Paul and James truly complementary? Do the Synoptics and John know the same Jesus?

- 2. Approach 2 is academically sound, but may leave one not knowing what to believe or how to use Scripture in the context of the church. Further, the whole approach is problematic because we may not know enough about each individual author to create substantial, separate theologies.
- 3. Approach 3 may be arrogant, and be unduly influenced by one's own preferences, culture, and experience.

#### C. Proposed methodology

- 1. Carefully examine each author in his own context, as best one can determine it, with the goal of identifying his major theological convictions and emphases.
- 2. Note differences among various authors, with the goal of identifying different issues, concerns, and perspectives that existed in the Early Church (as found in Scripture).
- 3. Identify common threads, themes, and beliefs found among various authors, with the goal of discovering the unity that exists amidst the diversity.
- 4. Listen to (and reflect on) the various voices of interpreters over time, including today, in various contexts. What are the different ways texts are experienced and understood?
- 5. Consider which texts speak most powerfully and meaningfully to you, and why.
- D. Major theological categories of New Testament Theology
  - 1. Theology
  - 2. Christology
  - 3. Pneumatology
  - 4. Ecclesiology
  - 5. Soteriology
  - 6. Eschatology
  - 7. Ethics/Discipleship

#### **Discussion Questions**

What is the proper role of the Bible in doing theology in your opinion?

How do you think one should study NT Theology? By theological topics? By authors? By current issues and needs? Why?

#### Weeks 2-6—Paul: Christian Living Through the Risen Christ

- 1. Paul: issues in interpretation, core, new perspective
- 2. Romans—Paul's theological masterpiece
- 3. Philippians—Citizens of Heaven
- 4. Synthesis of Paul's theology
- 5. Evolution of Paul's theology and those who followed him

#### Week 2

#### **2.1** Introduction to Pauline Theology

- I. The Primacy of Paul
  - A. From a historical point of view, Paul's writings represent the earliest extant New Testament documents. In them he openly focuses on the kerygma (message preached), which evangelists have proclaimed throughout the world over the centuries, especially among Protestants.
  - B. While the Gospels present themselves as the life and teaching of Jesus before the establishment of the church, they were clearly written by the post-resurrection church, and were written after most of Paul's writings.
  - C. From a theological point of view, Paul's extensive writings provide far more theological material to draw on for reconstructing the theology of the early church than other NT writers provide.
  - D. Thematically, Paul's interest in Jesus is limited to Jesus' death and resurrection. He focuses on the era of the post-resurrection Church and post-coming-of-the Holy Spirit. In fact, Paul can talk about the Gospel and the Christian faith with hardly any reference to the earthly life and ministry of the historical Jesus apart from his death and resurrection.
- II. How scholars draw on Paul's letters to discuss his theology

How scholars draw on Paul's letters to discuss his theology

- A. Most scholars today focus on the seven undisputed letters of Paul (Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thess., Philemon) in order to distill Paul's theology. At the same time, the additional six NT writings (Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, the Pastoral epistles), traditionally ascribed to Paul, are very important for discussing Paul's theology.
- B. "Deutero-Paul" means, literally, "secondarily Paul." Biblical writings that are designated "deutero-Paul" are writings that are largely congruent with Paul's teaching, but not necessarily written by Paul himself. The authorship of these deutero-Pauline epistles is "disputed." This means, that some scholars believe that Paul wrote some or all of these additional six letters, while others do not.
- C. Those who hold the position that Paul did not write one or more of the books traditionally ascribed to him do so for various reasons. For example, the views in one of these disputed books allegedly contradict Paul's theology. In other cases, the doubts arise from different language used, difficulty squaring the chronology of Paul's travels with what he says in

- his undisputed letters or in Acts, the development of the church structure, or other "internal" tensions perceived.
- D. The dispute includes a disagreement on which books belong on this list. Some scholars will view Ephesians and Colossians, for example, as authentically Paul, but may consider 2 Thessalonians and the Pastorals as deutero-Paul.
- E. When analyzing "deutero-Pauline" and "disputed-Pauline" texts, scholars look for points of agreement, "logical extensions" of Paul's thought from the undisputed 7 epistles, and what might be reversals or movements in different directions from Paul's earlier writings.
- F. Traditionally, there is a fourteenth book of the New Testament that has been attributed to Paul: the book of Hebrews. However, today, few scholars would argue that Paul was its author.<sup>5</sup>

#### III. Paul: Contextual Theologian (See map of Paul's missionary journeys)<sup>6</sup>

- A. His theology grew out of what Christ revealed to him (starting on the road to Damascus) and from his interpretation of the Old Testament in light of the resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit on believers.
- B. When he wrote letters, Paul was not a speculative theologian, who created new philosophies or theories about God.
  - 1. His letters frequently express his personal experience with God or the experience of his readers.
  - 2. The body of his letters and paraenesis (practical instructions) combined theology and ethics that usually pertained to the concrete situations of his readers.
  - 3. His recipients were largely the churches he founded or individuals he had mentored (discipled) personally.
  - 4. At the same time, it is fair to say that he "theologized" when talking about the Gospel. This means that he was actively interpreting his Jewish faith, which was rooted in Scripture and tradition, in light of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection, the activity of the Holy Spirit, and the theological challenges posed by opponents and needs of his congregation.
- C. When he preached the Gospel in Asia, Greece, and Rome, he did so first to the Jews who largely rejected his message; and then mostly to Gentiles in contexts where either Christianity was a minority religion or virtually non-existent.
  - 1. When he preached to Jews, he found that many were very traditional in their beliefs and resistant to a new interpretation of the Old Testament and to hearing about Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.
  - 2. When he preached to Gentiles, he was proclaiming the Gospel in religiously pluralistic settings, where most people were pagan (polytheists who worshipped multiple gods and participated in religious festivals).
- D. Comparisons to today

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> On the various categories to which the fourteen books traditionally assigned to Paul, see <a href="http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Paul-Disputed.htm">http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Paul-Disputed.htm</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See Appendix 2, "Purposes of Paul's Letters," for more detailed discussion of why he wrote as he did and why he expresses his theology differently in different letters. The theory of "core and contingency" is presented as one way to explain how Paul contextualizes his message to various communities to which he writes.

- 1. preaching to Hindus in India today, where most people believe in many gods and participate regularly in religious rites and festivals
- 2. preaching to Buddhists in Myanmar (e.g., in Mandalay or Yangon) today, where the vast majority of people do not believe in God, do not know God, and follow the teaching and practices of Buddha (and the Buddhist monks) in a religious sort of way
- 3. preaching to ethnic minorities in Myanmar who live in remote villages who practice animism or tribal religions (highly superstitious, believe in many spirits, or Nats)
- 4. preaching the Gospel in traditional churches, where many people are Christians because of the beliefs of their parents or community. They may have a high loyalty to the Christian faith and tradition, but lack a personal relationship with God through Christ or any experience with the Holy Spirit.

#### IV. Core of Paul's Theology (widely debated)

## A. The Gospel (Romans 1:16-17)—What do you see of theological significance in these verses?

- 1. The Gospel is power
- 2. This power comes from God
- 3. God's power brings about our salvation
- 4. This "Good News" comes first to the Jews who were waiting for God's salvation, and second to the Gentiles, who did not know of God's promises, but now are included in God's master plan of salvation.
- 5. The revelation of God, God's character, and God's will come in successively more illuminating ways.
  - a. Through Creation (outer circle in diagram of concentric circles)
  - b. Through Law and Prophets (OT) and Apostles (NT)
  - c. Through Jesus and Christ's death and resurrection (center circle
- 6. In this Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed.
  - a. In this context, Paul is referring to the righteousness that God provides to believers in Christ (being cleansed from our sins and placed in a right relationship with God). See, too, Rom 3:21-22; 4:3, 5-6, 9, 11, 13, 22, 24; 5:17-18, 21; 6:13, 18, 20; 8:10; 9:30-31; 10:3-6; 14:17.
  - b. At other times, on occasion, Paul uses the same Greek word *dikaiosune* to refer to God's righteousness or justice. E.g., 3:25-26. Cf. NIV, which translates *dikaiosune* as "justice"; and NRSV, which translates it as "righteousness." Both are correct. See, too, Rom 3:5.
  - c. In some verses it is ambiguous whether Paul is referring to the righteousness that God confers on believers or to the character of God. E.g. Rom 1:7.
- 7. Those who are made righteous by God are made so through faith.
- 8. Paul was not ashamed of this Gospel. Though he would elsewhere say that the Gospel ("Christ crucified," 1 Cor. 1:23) was foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews, he was not ashamed to proclaim it. Why not? Because he had experienced the truth of it in power; it had transformed his life. As a result, he was not embarrassed to preach the Gospel in a pluralistic, polytheistic context. Nor was he embarrassed to preach it to Jews who prided themselves in their ability to keep the law.
- B. Other key images or concepts in Paul

- 1. Justification language is found primarily in Romans and Galatians, but also on occasion in other letters (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:7).
- 2. "Reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:19-19; Col 1:20-22; Rom 5:11; 11:15; Eph 2:16)
- 3. "Gospel" (e.g., Philippians 1; Romans 1:16)
- 4. "Christ" (everywhere)
- 5. "Salvation" (Romans 1; 11; 13; 2 Cor 1; 6; 7; Eph 1; 6; Phil 2; 1 Thess 5; 2 Tim 2; 3; Titus)

#### Gerald G. O'Collins explains that according to Paul:

Salvation means life "in Christ" (Rom 8:1; 16:7; 1 Cor 15:22), the gift of the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5; 8:9, 11), "peace with God" (Rom 5:1), "justification" (Rom 4:25), being a "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17), enjoying "reconciliation" (Rom 5:10-11; 2 Cor 5:8, 20) and existence as the "adopted" sons and daughters of God (Gal 4:4-7).

- C. The core of Paul's theology: "The Gospel, which announces salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and transforms our relationship to God, to ourselves and others by the power of the Holy Spirit."8
  - 1. **The power of the cross.** Salvation is made possible by the work of Jesus on the cross. In turn, the cross became a powerful symbol in preaching the Gospel, which declares the death of Jesus on behalf of humanity (e.g., **1 Cor 1:17-18**). The cross, then, also symbolizes the death (to self) of those who follow Christ (Gal 5:11; 6:12, 14; cf. Phil 3:18) and the means by which God reconciled believers in Christ to God and to one another (Eph 2:16; Col 1:20) and defeated the powers of evil (Col 2:14-15). **Symbol: Cross**
  - 2. **Grace and faith in Jesus Christ.** Sinners are saved by grace through faith. Grace = God's unmerited gifts to human beings. God takes the initiative to reach out to humanity with love, mercy, and ongoing provision for our needs in various ways, the chief of which is through the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those who are saved from the consequences and power of sin are those who experience the grace of God and put their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord (**Eph 2:8-9**; Phil 2:9-11).
  - 3. **The ongoing role of the Holy Spirit.** Believers are filled with and transformed by the Holy Spirit. We are transformed by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ and the internal working of the Holy Spirit. We are given the ability to believe in God's promises. We are enabled to receive God's love, to love ourselves and to love others. God's grace leads us to real repentance, where we turn away from sin and embrace the life God intends for us. (E.g., Rom 8:1-27; Gal 5:16, 22-25; 1 Cor. 15:10). Cf. Ghandi, "I like Christ, but not Christians."
  - 4. God's faithfulness. The Gospel also announces the fulfillment of Jewish hope and expectation, and thus God's faithfulness to God's promises. (Rom 1:2; 3:3; cf. 3:25-25; 15:8; 2 Cor 1:20) Symbol: Two-way vertical arrow

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Gerald G. O'Collins, "Salvation," in *Dictionary of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. By James Peter, Vol. 2 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1985), 911.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Compare: Schreiner, who argues that the chief purpose of the NT (not just Paul) is "to magnify God in Jesus Christ" (*New Testament Theology*, 2008).

- 5. Christian vocation/calling. As sinners saved by grace, believers are called to live a Christ-centered, Spirit-led life, filled with good works, witness, and Christian service, as we become more and more like Christ. (Rom 8:28-30; 4:11-32; Eph 2:10; 1 Cor 12; Titus 2:11-14) Symbol: Two-way horizontal arrow
- II. Some competing or alternative theological or philosophical "cores"
  - A. Other New Testament Authors
    - 1. Matthew: Law and Jesus (lived righteousness serving King of Kingdom of Heaven)
    - 2. Luke: Jesus, Repentance, Forgiveness of Sins, Social Activism
    - 3. Mark: Jesus, Servanthood, Dying to self
  - B. Roman Catholic Church (RCC) affirms a triune God, the divinity of Jesus Christ, and Christ's role of Savior. The RCC teaches that salvation comes by grace through faith, but through the Church and human beings have an obligation to do good works and will be judged by their works. At the Second Vatican Council, the definition of the church was broadened beyond just the RCC to include all branches of Christianity.<sup>9</sup>
  - C. Anglicans emphasize the role of the Church as that which God created through the death and resurrection of Christ, and which is maintained through the liturgy, Eucharist, and apostolic structure (bishops and priests). Salvation is less about personal experience and more about faith in what God has accomplished and continues to accomplish through the body of Christ. 10
  - D. Eastern Orthodox Church theology is similar to the Catholic Church in terms of their beliefs about the triune God, although they teach that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, as was originally agreed upon at the Councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Constantinople (AD 381). The RCC added "and from the Son" in its version of the Nicaean Creed, which is used by Protestants as well to this day. Salvation is a core concept in Orthodox teaching, but the means of salvation is described more as joining the love relationship that exists within the Trinity rather than just escaping punishment for sin. That is, in terms of emphasis, salvation for the Orthodox is more about healing and transformation than about forgiveness and deliverance from punishment.

Salvation is the goal of Christianity, and the purpose of the <u>Church</u>...Orthodox Christianity strongly believes that <u>God</u> became man, so that man may become like God. This concept of <u>theosis</u>, rejects that salvation is a positive result to a legalistic dilemma, but is instead a healing process. Orthodoxy views our inclination to <u>sin</u> as a symptom of a malady that needs treatment, not just a transgression that requires retribution. One of the distinctive characteristics of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See <a href="https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/essays-theology/vatican-ii-themes-church-ecumenical">https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/essays-theology/vatican-ii-themes-church-ecumenical</a> (accessed July 12, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> See Michael Ramsey, The Gospel and the Catholic Church

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> For a brief discussion on this issue, see "The Filoque Clause," online, published by the Eastern Orthodox Church in America on July 11, 2012, at https://oca.org/reflections/fr.-lawrence-farley/the-filoque-clause (accessed July 12, 2018).

Orthodox Christian thinking is that it sees the <u>Gospel</u> message not as law, but as relationship. It speaks of the mystery of the <u>Holy Trinity</u> in terms of the relationship of love that exists among them. To join in that love is the work that will lead to salvation.<sup>12</sup>

- III. Some NonChristian theological or philosophical "cores"
  - A. Judaism: Law, Covenant, Sacrifices, Messiah, Moses, Obedience, Mercy
    - 1. Traditional Christian Perspective on Judaism: Salvation came to those who faithfully observed the Torah. Paul was opposed to Judaism, and his Gospel of grace was a radical departure from the Judaism of his day.
    - 2. Paula Eisenbaum, *Paul was not a Christian!* (I.e., Paul was a Jew. See p. 82.) Paula argues that the traditional perspective is misguided, and that Paul should be seen as a Jew and not through the lens of modern day Christians.

TCG: Indeed, Paul was a Jew. For him, the Church is the true Israel. Yet, while Paul's Jewish-based theology may be underappreciated by some modern day Christians, Paul cannot be completely understood as a Jew because of his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. For 2000+ years Judaism has continued to reject Jesus as the fulfillment of their expectations.

- 3. New Perspective on Paul. E.P. Sanders et al. argue that the Judaism of Paul's day already was grounded in grace. His work has prompted what is called a "New Perspective on Paul".
  - a. 2 major assumptions
    - 1) Judaism was fundamentally a religion of grace.
    - 2) There wasn't much one had to do to remain in the covenant.
  - b. Jesus was opposed because he was seen as a law-breaker, deliberately provoking the religious leaders by flagrant law breaking.
  - c. Jesus was teaching in the Hillel tradition (non-legalistic), as opposed to the dominant tradition in 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism, prior to the destruction of the Temple.
  - d. Paul was opposed by Jews and Torah-observing Jewish Christians. Paul, too, was a Jew; but his faith in Jesus significantly influenced his Jewish theology. Thus his understanding of faith in Christ was not opposed to Judaism, but to a legalistic strand of Judaism.

<sup>12</sup> https://orthodoxwiki.org/Soteriology (accessed July 12, 2018).

- e. Conceptual core of Judaism of Paul's day, then, was "covenantal nomism". That is, the covenant is God's choice/promise/grace. Israel's response: obedience to law; but God cannot break his promises. (Hillel, too?)
- B. Hellenism: Gods, Philosophy, Logic/Reason, Eternal Soul
- C. Humanism: glory and potential of human beings
- D. Materialism: what matters most is the physical world and acquisition of possessions. (Note: beware of materialism that masquerades as theology, e.g., health and wealth Gospel; perhaps even some liberation theologies.)
- E. Buddhism: self-effort to detach from those desires that produce suffering.
  - 1. Theravada Buddhism (Sometimes called Hinayana, or "lesser vehicle", traditional Buddhism) is individualistic and focuses on self-effort to escape this world of suffering and to reach the state/experience of Nirvana.

Buddhist perspective: "No one saves us but ourselves." 13

2. Mahayana Buddhism ("greater vehicle") has developed to include concepts of deity-like Bodhisattvas who model compassion for others as part of their process of seeking enlightenment. Forms of Buddhism that belong to the Mahayana family pray to Buddha and seek help from Buddha, and thus are far less self-reliant, and more similar to Christian faith in and reliance on Christ. However, according to Pastor Hideki Ui, Japanese pastor serving in Yangon, most Buddhists in his country are ignorant of the official teaching of Buddhism. They are usually Buddhist by tradition and to honor their families.

#### 2.3 Small Group Discussion—Questions/Issues

What do you think about Paul's theology? Does it touch you and resonate with your own faith and experience with God? How so? If not, what's missing in his theology that is important to you? What questions about Paul's theology do you have?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> K. Sri Dhammanada, *What Buddhists Believe*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia, 2002), 372.

#### Week 3—Pauline Theology in Romans and Philippians

#### 3.1 Romans

#### Introduction

The book of Romans, written in about AD 57, is the classic New Testament text on Christian theology. Some parts are not easy to understand, other parts may be difficult to accept. Nevertheless, two theological truths stand out among many:

- Our spiritual hope rests in the magnificent grace of God.
- God's work in our life makes it possible for us to become the people God always intended that we would be.

In the first 11 chapters, most of the teaching is doctrine or theology, without practical application or instruction. However, Paul's teachings in Romans have *huge* implications for how we view ourselves, how we view God, how we relate to God, how we understand our purpose for life, and ultimately how we live. But we must be willing to spend a lot of time thinking about concepts and reflecting on possible implications, before he gets to the practical teaching (*parenesis*) in Romans 12-15.

Soteriology Traditional Reformed (Lutheran, Presbyterians, many Baptists) position: justification by grace through faith apart from works of the Law comes principally from Romans and Galatians. Some refer to the following collection of verses as the "Roman Road to Salvation." <sup>14</sup>

- 1. Everyone is a sinner and in need of God's forgiveness (Rom 1:18-32; 3:9, 21-24)
- 2. The basis for justification is faith in God's promises (Rom 4:4-5; 5:1; cf. Eph 2:8-9)
- 3. God's love was demonstrated concretely in the death of God's Son, Jesus, and the giving of the Holy Spirit (5:6-8)
- 4. The consequence of human sin is physical and spiritual death, but eternal life is still possible through the gift of Jesus Christ (6:23).
- 5. Those who are justified/saved are those who believe that God has raised Jesus from the dead and who confess (acknowledge aloud) that Jesus Christ is Lord (ruler of the universe and leader; 10:9-10).
- 6. Broadly speaking, everyone who trusts in God and calls on the name of the Lord (Jesus) will be saved (10:11-13).

#### Christology

Jesus, the Son of God—A unique identity, a unique relationship to God, and a unique role in the universe. The cosmic Christ of Paul is still connected to the historical Jesus. (E.g., Romans 1:1-7)

There may have been different traditions in the Early Church re: how and when Jesus became or was recognized as the Son of God because of the various teachings found in the Bible:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> See Appendix 11, below.

- 1. The Son of God existed before Creation and was the Word made flesh (John 1:14);
- 2. Jesus was conceived as a result of the Holy Spirit's joining with Mary (Luke 1:35);
- 3. Jesus was declared to be God's Son at his baptism (Mark 1:11; Matt 3:17; Luke 3:21; cf. John 1:32-34); and
- 4. Jesus Christ was declared or appointed Son of God at his resurrection (Romans 1:4.) 15
- 5. Jesus Christ was appointed high priest by God at some point, at which God said to Christ, "Today, I have become your father" (Heb. 5:5). Yet, elsewhere in Hebrews, the author claims that God made the universe through the Son, and that the Son is the exact representation of God's being (Heb. 1:2-3).

**Point**: Historically, the "Son of God" designation for Jesus denoted his divine nature, his special status conferred by God, or both. The early church wasn't sure how to explain how and when Jesus Christ became the Son of God, but overall the biblical witness keeps returning to his identification with God, the Father, and pre-existent status as Son of God. Thus, in AD 325, the Council of Nicaea resolved the issue for the Church by declaring that Christ was both truly divine and truly human. The doctrine of the Trinity, then, viewed the Son of God as co-existing with God the Father eternally, and taking on human form (incarnate) with the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb. (This view was reaffirmed at the Council of Constantinople, AD 381.)

In Romans, and indeed most of his writings, Paul does not concern himself with Jesus' divine origins; that's not what is truly important about Jesus' identity to him. Rather he focuses on Jesus' death, resurrection and ongoing relationship to Christians as the risen and exalted Christ (Messiah) and Lord of the universe.

#### Ethics

The flow of the Paul's long argument, starting from chapter 1 onwards, indicates that we are not capable of living righteously in our own power, we can only experience righteousness through faith in Christ, and yet we are expected to live righteously by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in those who have Christ within them. Thus, Paul's ethics grow out of his soteriology: "Act in a way that is consistent with the truth about who you are in Christ." Christ has made us righteous in God's eyes. We obey, not by following the law, but by putting our faith in Christ and trusting in God's promises (see chapter 4). We have the freedom to choose sin again or to live in ways that are consistent

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Yet, one could question whether Paul is truly saying that Jesus became Son of God *only* at his resurrection or if he is saying that his identity as Son of God was *made manifest* at his resurrection; see Gal. 4:4 and Col. 1, where Paul also portrays the Son of God as sent by God, thus suggesting that Jesus Christ was the Son of God long before his resurrection. Christ even participated in the creation of the world, according to these verses.

<sup>16</sup> Ernst Käsemann asks, is Paul saying, 'become who you are' or 'become what you can now become'? (see *Romans*, p. 173) In other words, does Paul believe that we are already transformed by God's grace, and now we need to act like it; or, we now have the potential to be transformed, so work on it?

with our righteous standing with God. As slaves to God, <sup>17</sup> we experience holiness and eternal life—now (because we're forgiven), over time (because the Spirit sanctifies us), and in the future (because we will be resurrected with an immortal body).

Grace is dynamic and produces real changes in our lives for the better, but the hope in which we stand is the *gift* of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Part of the gift is an outright pardon from sin, available on an ongoing basis for those who continue to trust in God's promises. Another part of the gift is power to change our lives because of Christ's presence and work in our lives. (Cf. RCC, who teach that righteousness is "imparted" to baptized believers, vs. Reformed who teach that righteousness is "imputed" to believers, wholly a gift that comes through Christ to undeserving sinners.)

Conclusion: Just because the Law is no longer our master does not mean that we are free to sin. On the contrary, God has replaced a system that produced more sins (the Law) with a different system that frees us from the power of sin (grace). Our lifestyle decisions should be made not based on whether we are under the Law but based on what fruit comes from our lifestyle choices. Sin leads to destruction and death (spiritual alienation from God and ultimately to physical death as well), righteousness leads to holiness which leads to eternal life (a right relationship with God that extends into eternity). By this Paul does not mean that we will earn eternal life by living righteously, but that eternal life is a gift of God that grows out of the righteousness that Christ has brought into our lives. Our part is to refuse to offer our bodies to our old master (Sin) and instead to offer ourselves to God in ways that fit with the righteousness he has given us in Christ. As we continue to offer our bodies as slaves to righteousness, we experience increased holiness and the life God intends for us (eternal life).

Paul "stands" on his belief that salvation comes by God's grace through faith. At the same time, he calls believers to earnestly pursue a practical righteousness (i.e., moral behavior) as a way of life. 18

#### Analogy:

Law may be compared to a beautiful woman. She is lovely and good.

Sin may be compared to a desire to exploit the woman in some way.

A person's desire to exploit a beautiful woman is not her fault. She is good, beautiful, and true. Sin that exploits her beauty to produce evil with a person.

Point: The Law is good. Sin uses it for evil (by tempting us to want what the Law forbids). Cf. The forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. (See Romans 7:7f.)

 $<sup>^{17}</sup>$  I.e., we are "owned" by God because of Christ and because we have offered ourselves to him in faith; we are not controlled by God.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> For more on Paul's view of grace, see Appendix 3.

#### 3.2 Philippians

Philippians provides an example of how a different context prompted Paul to use different theological metaphors and language in speaking of the Gospel and Christian life. Instead of using the justification language that we find in Romans, he talks about Christian identity as "citizens of heaven." Instead of talking about life in the Spirit, as he does in Romans and Galatians, he talks about having the mind of Christ and the active presence of God at work in our lives.

**Philippi context**. In the mid-first century, there was a Christian Church in Philippi, located in modern day Greece. The city was a Roman colony, which meant that many former Roman soldiers would have settled there, alongside the Greeks. Thus it was a multi-racial and cultural melting pot. As a Roman colony, its citizens had the same rights and privileges of those in Rome. No doubt, the Philippians knew what it meant to be true to Rome and to be faithful citizens of a Roman colony. Paul seems to want them to take that same principle of "good citizenship" and apply it to their identity as citizens of heaven.

**Purpose of letter.** The Apostle Paul founded the church in Philippi and loved the people there. His letter to them reveals his close relationship to them as well as his deep concern for their spiritual wellbeing. The Philippian Christians are scared because the non-Christians in their city appear to be trying to intimidate them. Instead of uniting to stand firm together, they are starting to turn against one another and think only of their own individual interests. They've lost their spiritual footing and perspective. They need help and encouragement.

Through sharing from his own personal experience, providing strong teaching, and presenting role models to imitate, Paul gives them what they need. He shows them how to handle their present challenges and how to move forward as a church in the midst of a very difficult situation. The whole letter for the Philippians is a guide to standing firm in our faith together so that we may experience the full joy that comes from living in God's will and serving Christ effectively.

#### **Relevance for studying NT Theology**

In Philippians, Paul does not use justification language to talk about the Gospel. He does not talk about Christ's sacrificial death or about living by the Holy Spirit. Instead, he draws on political and military language to address very practical, "occasional," concerns in Philippi: their fear, disunity, selfishness, anxiety and need to focus their minds on Christ and the work of the Gospel. Thus, Philippians is a letter that is crafted by the needs of the congregation, seen not only in the subject matter, but in the choice of words, metaphors, and theological language. Paul does not write a theological treatise, but his letter is nonetheless full of theology. In particular, we see:

- 1. Paul believed that God is actively involved in the lives of believers. God gives them an ability to believe, to experience God's power and love, to want to do the will of God, to do the will of God, to experience supernatural peace, and to trust in God. (1:6; 2:12-13; 4:13).
- 2. Paul is confident that God will also provide salvation after death (1:23: 3:20-21).

- 3. At the same time, believers have the responsibility to "exercise their heavenly citizenship worthily of the Gospel" (1:27) and to "work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling (2:12).
- 4. He appropriates an early Christian hymn to depict Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection—not to talk about soteriology, but to provide an example of sacrificial service and of God's faithfulness to those who obey him. (2:5-11)
- **5.** Paul describes the Gospel as personal and life-transforming, rather than doctrinal or forensic (i.e., a legal declaration of our justification by the decree and work of God). He contrasts what may be gained by human accomplishments or heredity to what can only gained by a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Thus, his highest value is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection in this life as well as the next. (Philippians 3)
- 6. Paul's teaching for practical daily living includes learning to focus on God and to trust in God always, especially in the midst of fears, dangers, and needs. Instead of speaking much about the Holy Spirit, as he does in Romans and Galatians, he teaches that one can experience peace from God that transcends all understanding. One can also learn to become self-sufficient through Christ who enables us to do all things we are required to do. (Philippians 4:4-7, 13)<sup>19</sup>

#### 3.3

What aspects of Paul's theology in Romans and Philippians seem particularly relevant for your own understanding of God and Christian living?

What questions do you have stemming from these lectures on Romans and Philippians?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> For "More Exegetical Highlights of Philippians," see Appendix 4.

#### Week 4—Paul's Theology in Deutero-Pauline Epistles

#### 4.1 Ephesians

Overview Ephesians is similar to Romans in a number of ways. It's a rich theological treatise summarizing key doctrines and presenting practical implications for daily Christian living. If not written by Paul, then Ephesians was written by those who learned from Paul. There is some literary dependence on Colossians, or vice versa, since some identical material can be found in both.

#### Important Theological Elements

- 1. There is a spiritual reality in the "heavenlies" (neo-Platonic concept?)—our salvation and inheritance exist in a different sphere of reality. (1:3)
- 2. Election and sovereignty of God (1:1-14) Note: 1:3-14 is one long sentence in the original Greek.
  - a. God's chose us to be adopted as his children (1:4-6, 9-12)
    - 1) through Jesus Christ
    - 2) for the "praise of his glory"
  - b. God's will is to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, Christ (1:9-10)
  - c. Soteriology (1:7, 13-14)
    - 1) Redemption through the blood of Jesus
    - 2) The forgiveness of sins
    - 3) In accordance with the riches of God's grace lavished on us
    - 4) We were included in Christ when we heard the word of truth and believed
  - d. Sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13-14)
  - e. Human purpose (teleology)
    - 1) To be holy and blameless in the sight of God (1:4)
    - 2) To be adopted as God's children (1:5)
    - 3) To bring glory to God (1:6, 11-12)
- 3. Believers have been sealed with the Holy Spirit (issue ever since: when do believers receive the Holy Spirit, and what does it mean to have the Spirit? Roman Catholic Church says infants are given the Holy Spirit at baptism; evangelicals typically say at the moment of receiving Christ as Savior. TCG: The Spirit of God is the one who gives life to our mortal bodies. Spiritually, the Holy Spirit works in unseen ways leading those who become believers to God and faith over time. This passage suggests that all believers are "sealed with the Spirit" in a way that is in addition to the spirit of God that all human beings have. On occasion, there is a special anointing of the Holy Spirit that is different from the work of the Holy Spirit that gives us faith; the charismatic movement emphasizes this additional anointing. (See Acts 2; Romans 8.)
- 4. The Gospel (2:1-10)
  - a. 2:1-10 is an excellent, abbreviated form of the argument of Romans 1-8.
  - b. The Gospel of grace and the proper place for works: Ephesians 2:8-10.

5. Jew and Gentile reconciled through Christ (2:11-22)

Paul is talking about the power of Christ and the cross to bridge the gap between Jews (who believed they had an exclusive relationship and covenant with God) and Gentiles (who were formerly outside of the covenant with God). In Paul's context, this was an important point to make because a) there were Jews who still wished to exclude Gentiles, and b) there were Judaizers, who were trying to make Gentile converts into Jews. Paul's point is that both Jews and Gentiles can meet at the point of the cross and through a common faith in Jesus.

Note: Paul is not saying that Christ has broken down the dividing walls between all religions, but between Jews (who excluded Gentiles) and Gentiles (who experienced hostility from Jews). He is not saying all Jews are saved, or all Gentiles are saved. He is saying that there is now a way for Jews and Gentiles to be united, and that way is through the blood of Christ, a common relationship with the Father, faith in Christ, and a common experience of the Holy Spirit, by which God dwells in believers in Christ.

- 6. The Gospel: Spiritual richness in Christ for all
  - a. Paul's apostleship (3:1-13)
  - b. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (3:14-21)
- 7. Ecclesiology: The Unity of Believers and Purpose of the Church—Ephesians 4

Paul's view of the church (ecclesiology) is more developed in Ephesians than in the seven undisputed Pauline epistles. This fact is one of the arguments for its deutero-Pauline status.

In chapter 4, Paul's goal seems to be to help the church to function more properly, something that requires each member to be humble and to act in loving ways toward one another (4:1-2; 4:14-5:3). When the church is functioning properly as a whole, then the body of Christ will mature and be built up (4:11-13).

One of the keys to functioning properly as a Church is to have a solid understanding of the Church (ecclesiology). For Paul, the Church is founded upon worship of the one true God, faith in and obedience to God's Son, Jesus Christ (our Savior and Lord), and the working of the Holy Spirit. His ecclesiology is thoroughly Trinitarian.

This understanding of the Church can provide a basis for unity in the Church. When we humbly recognize our dependence on the Trinity and acknowledge our common faith in and allegiance to Jesus Christ, we will be drawn together. So, Paul writes: There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (4:4-6, NIV)

The whole point of saying "one" is to emphasize that all Christians share much in common-the same God, Savior, Lord, Holy Spirit, faith, baptism and hope.

Today, we Protestants have difficulty understanding this passage, because there are so many different denominations, each with their own particular teachings, including modes of baptism. However, in Paul's day, he could far more easily say to the Ephesians, "there is one...," because, for the most part, there was just one Gospel. (As scholars, we know that there were differences among Christians and various schools of thoughts that developed in his day and over the centuries, e.g., the Judaizers. However, this fact does not invalidate Paul's general claim that in his day there was a common understanding of the foundation of the Church.)

- 8. Ethics/Parenesis—Practical instructions for daily Christian living (4:17-5:20)
- 9. Household codes (Ephesians 5:21-33)
  - a. Call to submit to appropriate authorities
  - b. Household codes
  - c. Priorities of love and respect in marriage
  - d. Christ is the Head of the Church
- 10. The Spiritual Battle—Ephesians 6:10-20

We have confidence in the Lord over powers of darkness (cf. the Buddhist fear of Nats, stemming from animism)

Important: The daily spiritual battle makes or breaks us as Christians.

#### **4.2** Colossians

Overview Colossians, with Ephesians, is thought to be deutero-Paul. The theology and themes fit well with Paul's undisputed writings, but some of the language seems out of place. Scholars, then, study Colossians with Paul, but acknowledge that it may represent a later development of his thoughts by those of his "school".

Note: Nowhere in the undisputed Pauline letters is there such a focus on Jesus or this kind of Christology. This may be an argument for its deutero-Pauline status, though not proof.

#### The great Christological affirmation of the New Testament. (1:15-23)

- Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation
- in him all things were created
- all things have been created through him and for him
- he himself is before all things
- in him all things hold together
- he is the head of the body, the church
- he is the beginning, the first born from the dead
- so that he might have pre-eminence
- in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell
- through him God was pleased to reconcile himself to all things

by making peace through the blood of his cross

#### The result:

- you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body through death
- so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him The conditions:
- provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith
- without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel

#### Commentary on Colossians 1:15-23

The attributes of Jesus found in this passage are truly mindboggling. Unbelievable, in one sense, because no human being could have these kinds of characteristics. Yet, aweinspiring, humbling, believable, in another sense, when we imagine how the Creator of the universe might have worked to reach out to humanity to save us and bring us to him.

In addition to making theological assertions about Jesus's identity, Paul also appeals to the Colossians' existential experience as further evidence for the truth of the Gospel. After his portrayal of Jesus Christ's identity, he writes about how their lives were actually changed as a result of their faith and their relationship with God through Christ. He says, they were alienated from God, enemies in their minds because of their evil behavior; but now God has reconciled them to God by Christ's physical body in order to present them holy and blameless before God. This reconciliation to God is a matter of faith (because they cannot experience it) and a matter of experience (because their minds and behavior have changed).

Then he gets to the point of his implicit exhortation. Their reconciliation with God now hinges on one factor. God has done everything to produce this reconciliation through Christ. Human responsibility is to believe. In the case of the Colossians, who already believed, their part was to continue in their "faith, established and firm, not moved out from the hope held out in the Gospel."

In Paul's argument we can see what was called centuries later both a "modern" and "post-modern" approach. That is, he combined assertions about who Jesus is and what God does for humans by grace through faith (a "modern" way to do theology); and he appealed to their experience with God (a "post-modern" priority).<sup>20</sup>

#### Theological Questions

• has the entire creation been reconciled to God because of Christ's sacrifice? (1:20)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> For some more comments on "Modern and Post-Modern Sensitivities," see Appendix 5.

- in spite of such a sweeping statement, Paul also presents a condition that needs to be met: perseverance in faith. (1:23)
- Perhaps this is where the Catholics get the notion that God's grace regenerates us, but that we have to remain "in good standing" to be saved in the end. However, these verses do not suggest persevering in works or personal acts of righteousness, or in absolution from a priest. The perseverance required is steadfastness in faith. (1:23)
- What does he mean by saying the gospel has been proclaimed to *every* creature under heaven? Hyperbole?

#### **Session 4.3** Small Group Discussion

- What appeals to you in the theology of Ephesians and Colossians?
- What concerns or questions do you have about the teaching in these two books?

#### Week 5—Synthesis of Paul's Theology

#### A. Theology:

- 1. God the Father is the monotheistic Creator of the Universe and Father (*abba*) of Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is due honor and allegiance according to the will of God (see especially Rom. 1:7; 15:6; 1 Cor. 8:6; 15:24; Gal. 1:3-4; 4:6; Col. 3:17).
- 2. God is sovereign: Theology of election (1 Cor 1, Rom. 9, vv. 14-26 especially; compare Eph. 1:1-14). **Read Romans 9:10-18.**
- 3. God is a covenant making and keeping God (Rom. 9:4; 11:27; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 3:14-17; compare Eph. 2:12).
- 4. God is a personal God, not just a force with personal characteristics. (See, e.g., 2 Cor. 5:5; Gal. 3:5; 4:6; Eph. 1:17. God is separate from his creation but gives us his Spirit.)

#### B. Christology: Jesus Christ

- 1. 2d Adam and vehicle for God's grace (**Rom 5:12-17, 18-21**)
- 2. Son of God—A unique identity, a unique relationship to God, and a unique role in the universe. (See Week 3.)
- 3. Jesus, Savior, in past, present, and future (1 Thess 1:10; Col. 1:17-18; Phil. 3:20; cf. Titus 3:3-7)—from before creation, to the cross, our personal experience with Christ through faith, and on Judgment Day.
- 4. Lord Jesus (**Phil 2:9-11**; Rom. 14:9 "For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living," etc.)
- 5. Co-Creator with God. See the greatest Christological affirmations in the NT: Colossians 1:15-23 (See Week 4.)

#### C. The Holy Spirit—Pneumatology

1. New life by the Spirit in the here and now (**Rom 8:1-9**)—The Spirit is God's answer to our sense of powerlessness in the face of sin's grasp (Romans 7:14-25).

"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9, NIV).

- 2. New life through the Spirit (Gal 5:13-25)—To keep in step with the Spirit is the only hope for a transformed life. Cf. RCC doctrine that grace enables humans to continually start fresh in seeking to obey and follow.
- 3. Christ has won the war over sin and death. We still need to fight the daily battles to defeat sin's influence in our lives with the help of the Holy Spirit. (e.g. Eph. 6:10-20)

#### D. Soteriology

1. The real death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis for salvation and hope for our own resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-8; Col 1:22).

- 2. Paul believed in a "substitutionary" concept of atonement: "God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement" (Romans 3:25). Thus, Jesus died "for our sins" to bring believers redemption from our sins (Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3; Galatians 1:4). Salvation is in and through Christ's sacrifice, but it comes through a dynamic process of being washed and renewed by the Spirit (Rom. 5:1-19; Titus 3:3-7).<sup>21</sup>
- 3. Salvation is based on promises of God (covenant), offered by His grace, received by faith, and experienced because of Christ and the Holy Spirit (3:24-29; see, too, Eph. 2:8-9).
- 4. Law was never a means of salvation. For the Jews, the covenant of God was offered by grace and received by faith. According to Paul's writing to the Galatians, the Law had two purposes:
  - a. It was added because of transgressions (Gal. 3:19), and thus the Law helps us to know God's will and to know covenant responsibilities. The Law also is a restraint on sin, and thus has political or civil value (*usus politicus sive civilis*).
  - b. The Law was intended to lead us (those held prisoners by the Law) to Christ (3:22-24). This is sometimes known as the elentical (elenchus) or pedagogical use of the Law (*elenchticus sive paedagogicus*).
  - c. Luther added a "Third Use of the Law": to guide Christian community (see 5:13-14). When we use the Law to show us the way of righteousness, it becomes the didactic or normative use of the Law (usus dictactus sive normativos).
- 5. The cross has power to save sinners (1 Cor 1:17-25; Gal 5:11; 6:12, 14; Eph 2:16; Phil 3:18; Col 1:20; 2:14). This idea is foolishness to those who do not believe (lit., those "who are perishing"), but the cross is the power of God for those who are being saved.<sup>22</sup> (See Week 2.)
- 6. Timing of Salvation: Past, present, and future

	Creation	The Cross	Personal faith	Today	Final judgment
←					
	ntion in mind or re creation	f God			
	Created in relati				

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> See Appendix 6 for a brief discussion on "Theories of Atonement."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> A former Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, wrote an excellent book on the central importance of the cross (more specifically, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) in Christian theology and a proper understanding of the role of the Church: *The Gospel and the Catholic Church: Recapturing a Biblical Understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009) This is a new edition based on the original, published in 1939.

with God

God provides salvation through Christ's work on cross Romans 3:25-26

> Forgiven, set free Hope, joy, Holy Spirit Titus 3:3-7 1 Thess 1:10

> > Experience of Eternal life now John 7:38; 1 Cor 1:18

> > > Pardoned Phil 3:20

E. Eschatology: Eternal Hope—"Now and Not Yet"

Question: What hope does Paul believe we have now? What are we waiting for?

- 1. Definition of biblical "hope": It's not a "wish" (hoping something happens that seems unlikely or improbable) but a solid expectation that God will deliver on his promises.
- 2. Resurrection of the body and immortality, transformation to new spiritual bodies (1 Cor 15:38-57; 2 Cor 5:1-5; cf. Jesus, who also taught about life after death and new, immortal bodies, Luke 20:34-36)
- 3. "Now and Not Yet" eschatology: the *parousia* (Second Coming) will fulfill what Christ began.
  - a. The Kingdom of God is both a present reality, which can be experienced by believers now (e.g., Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20), and a future hope, which is still awaited by believers (cf. 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5).<sup>23</sup>
  - b. The Spirit has been given as a guarantee of redemption and salvation (Eph 1:14).
  - c. Christ is coming back again in the clouds (1 Thess 4:13-5:11).
- 4. What happens when believers die?
  - a. Various answers offered by theologians: Immediate resurrection; soul-sleep; Purgatory; resting in Sheol.
  - b. Paul does not answer this question directly. Instead:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> L.J. Kreitzer, "Kingdom of God/Christ," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters, ed.*, Gerald Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993) 524-526. This reference was contributed by MIT student, Peter Hrang Lian Thang.

- 1) Those who "sleep" in the Lord will come with the Lord when he returns to join those who are still alive at the Second Coming (1 Thess 4:13-18).
- 2) Those who die go to be present with the Lord in some manner (Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:6-8).
- 3) Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:35-39).

## Comment on NT Eschatology

We find differences and tensions among the various prophecies and teachings about the end of the "end times" in the NT. We are thus left with many questions that cannot easily be answered.

- Will Christ establish his rule here on earth, or will there be a new heaven and new earth?
- Will Christ "rapture" believers to heaven, by coming part way to earth and returning to heaven with them, or will he be escorted by them to earth where he will establish his rule?
- Is Christ's rule on earth literal or figurative?
- Is Christ's rule now or in the future?
- What needs to be in place before Christ returns?
- Is Christ's return literal or figurative? If figurative, what does it symbolize? What difference does it make whether one believes Christ's return is literal or symbolic?

Key to Paul: Christ is coming back, and we need to be ready. (We need to hold on to our faith in Christ as our Savior and Lord. We need to live as children of the light, who have been called out of darkness to live as Christ-followers and witnesses to others who do not know Christ.)

- F. Ecclesiology rooted in Christology and Pneumatology: We are called to worship God the Father and serve Jesus Christ as Lord, all through the Holy Spirit.
  - 1. Church is the "body" of Christ, Christ is the "head," and it is created by the Spirit (I Cor 12:12ff.; Colossians 1:18; see, too, Ephesians 4; 5:23).
    - a. Richard Rohr, Catholic practical theologian and Franciscan brother, comments: "I like to picture the unity of spirit described here as an energy field, a dynamic force field, created by sharing the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of Love. Here is how one of the great Pauline scholars, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, explains it:

"The church differs from all other human groupings in so far as its unity is not functional but organic. Its members are not merely united by a common purpose, but share a common existence. An autonomous

Christian is as impossible as an independent arm or leg. Arms and legs exist only as parts. If they are given the status of an independent whole by amputation, they are no longer an arm or a leg. For a while they may look as if they were, but corruption has begun, and they can neither grasp nor walk. The same is true of believers. Their existence is loving--"without love I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2)—which necessarily implies a relationship to another person. To love and be loved is of the essence of Christianity and is constitutive of the being of the believer. They are bound together by what makes them be what they are. Only now does it become clear what Paul tentatively envisaged when he said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).<sup>24</sup>

- b. Paul Knitter: Since Christ is Spirit, we should think of human beings as his physical body. Thus, Paul's idea of the "body of Christ" should be taken literally. The way Christ is present in the world is through Christians.
- 2. Church functions according to spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4) **Read 1** Cor. 12:1-11.

**Definition:** A spiritual gift is an ability you have (natural, or specially given) that God uses to bring someone to faith or build them in some way.

# To know one's spiritual gifts

- 1) Interest—What breaks your heart/moves you/motivates you?
- 2) Ability/potential—What are your skills and aptitudes?
- 3) Experiment—Try various types of service/ministry
- 4) Sign of God's blessing—How are others affected by your service/ministry?
- 5) Pray

#### G. Ethics

1. Paul assumes the ongoing validity of the Old Testament moral code (Gal 5:13-14; Rom 13:9).

2. Ethics flow from pneumatology (e.g., Gal 5:13-25; **Rom 14:17-19**).

Rom. 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

Rom. 14:18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Rom. 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Taken from Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation, "Paul: Week 1", March 10. 2016. Rohr cites Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford University Press: 1998), 288.

3. Issue: to what extent is moral behavior a condition for salvation?

In passages like 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, where Paul talks about morality, he seems to exclude all sexually immoral people, along with many other sinners who live in a lifestyle of sin. At the very least, the passage is a call for repentance. But what does one do when he or she has failed in one of those categories (sexual morality, greed, drunkenness, homosexuality, etc.)? What does it mean for one's relationship with God or hope to inherit the kingdom of God if one cannot rise above this or that serious sin? And if a person does manage to set proper boundaries and avoid serious sin, will we say that he or she has now have earned their salvation? Or perhaps they've just succeeded in not losing it?

The admonition of 1 Corinthians raises the possibility that the Protestant interpretation of Paul may be skewed. The Catholics have always taught that there are mortal sins, i.e., that some sins will result in eternal death. Thus, there is an important place for human responsibility, and accountability. Other NT scholars, including Protestants, have recently argued that a better interpretation of Paul's soteriology is faith plus works, built up on the grace of God.

What is the best interpretation of Paul?

Experientially, the weight of human responsibility before God feels overwhelming; but if it is the truth, we must accept it. It will propel us to our knees. Perhaps the weight will drive us to God in new ways, and in so doing will expose us to a new level of grace and working of the Holy Spirit. Whereas, if we rely too much on grace, perhaps we will be complacent or will fail to come to grips with our sin as we ought.

The professor's experience: When I rely on grace, it leads to gratitude; and when I fall into sin, I never feel complacent. My love for God and appreciation for his kindness lead me to repentance, even if incomplete at times. When I rely on my own works, it is a slippery slope. At the end of such a slide are first pride and self-righteousness; and then shame and despair.

Because of the negative, discouraging consequences of believing that some sins can exclude us from salvation, Reformed theologians emphasize human unworthiness to ever fulfill all of God's requirements and our utter and complete dependence on the grace of God for salvation. Luther famously declared that Christians are "simultaneously sinners and saints" as a way of saying that we are saints in God's eyes by God's grace through faith in Christ, and yet we are always sinners, unable to completely escape the grasp of sin in our human experience.

- H. Sample Scriptures that sum up Paul's Gospel
  - 1. Romans 1:16
  - 2. Romans 3:23-26
  - 3. 1 Thessalonians 1:3-6
  - 4. Cf, Acts 26:15-18

## **5.3** Small Group Discussion and Integration

What thoughts, reactions, and questions arise for you related to Paul's theology?

## Week 6—Developed Paul's Theology (Disputed Pauline epistles)

#### 2 Thessalonians

Overview A harsher, more vivid, and somewhat different, eschatology, yet underlying theology is the same as found elsewhere in Paul

- 1. When the Lord Jesus will be revealed (1:5-10)
  - a. it will be with blazing fire with his powerful angels
  - b. he will give relief to believers who are troubled
  - c. he will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Context: This message of God's punishment for those who do not know God or obey the Gospel is not written for non-believers (i.e., this is not how evangelizes people). Rather, this teaching is to encourage the victims of persecution.
  - d. he will be marveled at among those who have believed
  - e. We will be gathered to him when he comes (2:1; with 1 Thess 4:17)
- 2. Before the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2:1-17)
  - a. Christ's return hasn't happened yet (2:2)
  - b. The rebellion must come prior to Christ's coming, and the "lawless one" must be revealed first (2:3-12). Cf. Daniel 8:23-26.
  - c. Call to stand firm and hold fast (2:13-17)
    - 1) Affirmation of God's choosing them to be saved (with Romans, Ephesians)
    - 2) Salvation is through sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth (with Romans, Ephesians, 1 Thessalonians)
    - 3) We are called to share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (with Romans 8)
  - d. Beautiful benediction affirms Pauline confidence in the grace of God that brings us salvation for eternity and that works in us now in this present age to encourage us and strengthen us in every good deed and word (2:16-17)

# Pastoral Epistles (1-2 Timothy, Titus)—Occasional letters written to individuals

## 1 Timothy

- 1. Theology, Christology, and Soteriology
  - a. The role of the Law is to restrain immoral behavior (1:8-11).
  - b. Paul is the worst of all sinners (1:15-16).
  - c. God (instead of Jesus or Christ) is called Savior (1:1; 2:3; 4:10).
  - d. Christ Jesus is the only mediator between God and human beings (2:5).
  - e. Christ gave himself as a ransom for all (2:6).
  - f. God is the Savior all people, and especially of those who believe (4:10).
- 2. Socially conservative (2:8ff.)
  - a. Men are to be holy, blameless, and prayerful (2:8)
  - b. Women are to be modest and submissive (2:9-11).

    Note: Suspicious evaluation of women in a perplexing passage (thus be careful in interpretation for today); signals direction church was to take in 2d century and beyond (2:11-15)

- c. Slaves should respect their masters and serve well (e.g., with Ephesians 4-5; Col. 3)
- 3. Ecclesiology: High standards and expectations for leaders, as well as "lay" leaders
  - a. Overseer must be above reproach (3:1-7)
  - b. Deacons likewise (3:8-10, 12)
  - c. Wives (of leaders?) likewise must be women of respect (3:11)
  - d. Note: 1 Timothy appears to assume a more developed ecclesiology than in other Pauline letters
  - e. The role of a pastor (4:12-16; 6:12-14, 20-21)

"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:12-16, NIV)

- f. Practical teaching for church leadership (5:1-25)
- 4. Eschatology: Some expectations, warnings, and implications for daily living (4:1-8)
- 5. Faith and Ethics (chapter 6)—Very Pauline attitudes
  - a. Teaching on "godliness with contentment," warning against love of money, and the duties of the rich (6:6-10, 17-19; cf. Philippians 4)

### 2 Timothy

- 1. Pneumatology and ministry—God saves us because of his good purposes: "I have been reminded of your **sincere faith**, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to **fan into flame the gift of God**, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did **not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline**. So **do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord**, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But **join with me in suffering for the gospel**, **by the power of God**, who has saved us and called us to **a holy life**—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. = **Hope for sinners** (2 Timothy 1:5-9a; see Ephesians 2:10)
- 2. Ecclesiology: Expectation of pastors
  - a. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.... Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope

that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:15, 22-26, NIV)

- b. "You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings." (2 Timothy 3:10-11a, NIV)
- 3. Eschatology
  - a. Paul's Farewell (4:6-22)
     Note: Paul's realization of his death prior to *parousia* (cf. earlier letters: I Thess 4:15-17)
  - b. Classic Pauline statement of faith and appropriate attitude toward life and service (2:5; 4:6-8; cf. Philippians 2:16-17; 4:1; 1 Cor. 9:25; 1 Thess 2:19)

#### Titus

Overview Titus was a trusted assistant to Paul. He traveled with him on at least one of his missionary journeys, helped Paul in various churches, and was left behind on Crete to help the new church there get well established. Paul's letter to Titus is filled with practical instructions on church leadership and the Christian life.

1. The Christian Life (2:1-15)

Note: Dynamic, moralistic concept of saving grace (2:11-14)

2. Life in a non-Christian Context (3:1-8a)

Note: Gospel message as God's acting in history to save humanity (3:3-7)

3. Theology is very Pauline at core:

Titus addresses both *what* Christian leaders and Christian church members are supposed to do, *why* these instructions are so important, and *how* it is possible to live them out. The Christian life is not about serving ourselves. It's about being in dynamic, living relationship with our loving heavenly Father that fits with God's purpose for us and the whole world. We are given a new identity in Christ and called to serve God's purposes in the world by doing good. We are called to be in tune with the Spirit of God in such a way that our hearts pour out love and praise for God, that the fruit of the Spirit is evident in our lives.

Issues in Interpreting Deutero-Pauline and Disputed Pauline epistles

Academic and interpretative questions: Where do you see tension between the undisputed Paulines and the disputed books (and perhaps the deuteron-Pauline epistles as well)? Do you think Paul's ideas developed (as most scholars do), or do you think that others have developed his thinking in logical ways, but separate from him? Do you see signs of possible misrepresentation or distortions of Paul's thought? Where do you see the later books complementing the earlier ones?

• Doctrines in tension; possible later developments/extensions of Paul

#### Examples:

- 1) salvation has come in power "now" (e.g., 1 Thess. 1:4-10) vs. salvation is "not yet" (e.g., spiritual blessings in the "heavenlies," Ephesians 1:3; cf. 1 Cor. 15:19)
- 2) higher Christology in Colossians and possibly 1 Timothy
- 3) eschatology: Christ will come as a thief (1 Thess.), rebellion and lawless one must appear first (2 Thess.)
- 4) salvation only to those who confess Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9-10) vs. universal sounding teaching that God is the Savior of all of humanity (1 Timothy 4:10)
- 5) "neither male nor female in Christ" in Galatians vs. subordination of wives in Ephesians and Colossians, to general inferiority of women in 1 Timothy?
- 6) Harsher view of women in 1 Timothy than in Galatians and Ephesians?

What bearing do these tensions or developments have on your understanding of Paul's theology and NT theology? What is the relevance of your conclusions for reading/interpreting/applying teachings of these letters?

## **Options**

- 1. Will you give them a secondary status when in conflict with undisputed?
- 2. Will you view them as further revelation of the Spirit or meddling of later generation?
- 3. If meddling or misrepresentation, then what does that say about inspiration of these texts? What does it say about the judgment of the Early Church Fathers at Nicaea in 425?)

Practical Application: It is easy to observe tensions and even to criticize views that you don't like or agree with. However, as interpreters of Scripture, especially in the roles of preacher, teacher, and pastor, how will you develop a constructive method for interpretation of these sacred texts that builds up your congregation? What do you think is an appropriate way to use Scripture, and how will you handle difficult or troubling passages in your ministry? (These questions belong under the discipline of "hermeneutics.")

## **6.3** Small Group Discussion and Integration

Discuss the issues listed above.

- 1. Which of Paul's teachings do you struggle with the most?
- 2. Where do you see contradictions or difficulties for interpretation?
- 3. How should preachers deal with teaching found in Paul's writings when you don't like it or understand it or agree with it?

## Weeks 7-9—The Synoptic Gospels: Christianity Grounded in Jesus of Nazareth

#### 7.1 Mark

## I. Jesus and the Gospels

A. New Testament Theology is, at its core, about Jesus Christ.

"The most important determinative factor for New Testament Theology is Jesus, particularly the impact of his death and resurrection [and exaltation to heaven]" (Dunn, p. 24).

"With Jesus, a whole new chapter had dawned, a whole new age had arrived, a new revelation...[that] brought [the previous revelation] to completion and illumined its ongoing significance" (Dunn, p. 25).

- B. While "Christianity" has historically revolved around the Easter event, the story of Jesus of Nazareth was deemed by the Early Church important enough to record and preserve in four versions—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Jesus of Nazareth has always been regarded as the essential founder and inspiration for Christianity, even if Christianity as we know it today was largely shaped by Paul's post-resurrection theology. Thus, even though the Gospels are written after Paul's epistles, they deal with important material Paul does not cover. They claim to present the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and the history of the Jesus Movement prior to the resurrection, that is, the historical Jesus' own mission and message.
- C. Our historical records of Jesus' life and ministry are theologizing about Jesus. "The Gospels must be understood as the result of years of 'theologizing' the Jesus tradition—i.e., discussing, reflecting on, remembering...in ways that deeply influenced the life and practice of the early disciples... For them, the tradition was not fixed. That is the point! It was fluid, moving, living, coming to expression...." (Dunn, p. 28). Note, too, the process of theologizing the Jesus tradition began well before the resurrection and did not wait until after Easter. (pp. 28-29)
- D. Among the four Gospels, we need to differentiate between the Synoptic Gospels and John. Matthew, Mark and Luke seem to value the pre-death and pre-resurrection life and ministry of Jesus and seek to ground their theology in the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. John, on the other hand, seems to be a thorough going post-resurrection interpretation of Jesus' life and ministry. His work belongs after Paul's, because it appears to be a specific response to Gnosticism, which probably arose at the end of the first century.

#### II. Key Background Information to Mark

#### A. Context

1. Provenance. Rome most likely (1 Peter 5:13; Patristic tradition, latinisms, unfamiliarity with some geographical facts of Palestine).

- 2. Addressees. Debated. Likely the church in Rome with application far beyond Rome. This was probably a church in the midst of persecution or about to face it which needed both to be comforted and to be reminded of the dangers of shirking the way of the cross of Christ. Mark wants to make crystal clear to these Christians what true discipleship is all about.
- B. Date. Situation of "A." combined with no specific indication the temple has already been destroyed has led most scholars to the period during Nero's persecutions of Christians in Rome and of the Jewish War when the destruction of Jerusalem seemed a very real possibility. Thus between 66 and 70 A.D.
- Interpretation: When it comes to applying the teaching of this gospel to our own lives, <u>one</u> of the first questions to ask any given passage would be: What does this have to say to someone who may be suffering for Christ or who may be tempted to shirk the way of the cross?

## II. Theological Emphases

- A. Key Figure = Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1)
  - 1. This isn't first a story about the early church, or Mark, or the disciples, or even discipleship. It's good news related to a man named Jesus, who was no ordinary man. This is important to remember because there will be no valid application of the teaching of this Gospel without recognizing somehow its connection to the key subject, Jesus.
  - 2. Jesus is the Christ (Messiah) and is the Son of God. Mark emphasizes the humanity of Jesus to a great extent. This will be seen in his frequent use of the title "Son of Man" (14x), yet his use of the title, Son of Man is also an allusion to his divinity, in the vein of Daniel 7. To Mark, contrary to some interpretations, Jesus is not just a man, even a very good man. Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. This reference to Jesus as the son of God may refer to a royal identity as a king (like David; so Paul Achtemeier), but the context of Mark suggests something more. Though Mark is sometimes thought to represent a "low Christology," the facts indicate that Mark saw Jesus as divine. For example, Jesus had access to power of God, God's testimony at baptism and transfiguration suggest his "uniqueness" as the son of God, the testimony of the demons, and the response of the Pharisees who wanted to execute him for blasphemy all point to Mark's belief that Jesus was seen to be God's son, even if Mark does not include traditions of birth narratives or pre-existent logos theology.
  - c. See Frank Matera; Mark presents the good news of God (1:14) proclaimed by Jesus, announcing the kingdom (versus Paul who focused on the announcer of the kingdom—Jesus Christ is the good news for Paul).

#### B. Messianic Secret

Jesus did not want to rally a popular following of the masses. He needed to gather together and train disciples, but **his mission lay in his death**. In other words, Jesus did not come to be served (honored, praised, given power, authority or wealth by humans) but to serve and give his life a ransom for many (10:45). Jesus cannot be understood apart from this role, and this was not understood until the cross (hence, the centurion's confession as a climax to the narrative (15:39).

## C. Call to Faith and Discipleship

Mark's major subject was to portray who Jesus was and is. In addition, his major intended application was to portray a true understanding of faith and discipleship.

- 1. Discipleship as portrayed by the twelve. They are both positive and negative examples. (See 1:16-20; 2:14; 3:13-18; 6:7-12; 10:28 examples of positive references. See 8:17ff; 9:34; 10:37; 8:31-33; 14:50, 66-72 for negative references.)
  - Observation #1 In terms of commitment, true discipleship means total obedience to Jesus, even if it means giving up literally everything to follow him—which it sometimes did!

Note: There is a dynamic movement from the disciples' early faithfulness to their becoming instruments of Satan and fair-weather friends. The "insiders" wind up as "outsiders," (see Mk 4); yet they still receive the promises of great blessing in chap. 10.

- •Observation #2: In terms of attitude, true discipleship means first of all humility. In terms of life experience, it means both servanthood and suffering. Jesus is the example par excellence: "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (10:45).
- •<u>Mark's Pastoral Concern</u>: The standard for discipleship is clear: it's the way of obedience, humility and the cross; but human failure is a normal part of human discipleship. Mark never compromises the standard, but shows that normal, failing human beings can follow Jesus by the grace of God.
- "They . . . said to him, 'Then who can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:26-27).
- 2. Mark uses a multitude of minor characters as powerful examples of various responses to Jesus both positively and negatively.
  - •Observation #3: Faith and Discipleship are interrelated but distinguished. There was such a thing as faith for healing and reception of forgiveness through baptism (1:4), but discipleship, in addition, explicitly meant giving up all to follow Jesus "on the way" (to Jerusalem, to his death). Faith that results in discipleship and in fruitfulness (including becoming fishers of people [1:17]; cf. 4:1-9) meant quite literally a change in life and lifestyle, a change in life perspective and attitude, a movement from self-exaltation and

gratification to self-surrender and sacrifice in service of the kingdom of God. Thus, we find key verses calling for this radical re-orientation of mind and life (especially 3:35; 8:33-35).

## D. Apocalyptic Eschatology

- 1. The Kingdom of God (KOG)
  - a. Jesus preaching time is fulfilled, KOG at hand (1:15). For Mark, Kingdom is just ahead (and not yet). Jesus' power suggests the advent of the kingdom, but it is Matthew who makes this explicit...

Matera: KOG has arrived in secret.

- b. Jesus went through Galilee preaching (1:38f)
- c. Many displays of power of God... but no "Sign" to be given (8:12), i.e., to "prove" self by prediction/performance/fulfillment
- d. Kingdom basically still ahead.
  - 1) 8:38
  - 2) 10:37ff.
  - 3) Chap 13

<u>Conclusion</u>: We don't "watch" for signs as much as we "watch" by keeping ready for Christ's return by "each doing his/her work" (13:34) for the kingdom and Gospel, and by keeping "awake", i.e., by not being distracted or deceived.

Matera: All signs have been fulfilled for Mark. Jesus could now return at any moment.

## **DISCIPLESHIP = WATCHFULNESS (World of Values)**

(From David Rhoads)

What People Want for Themselves	What God Wants for People	
Self-Centered	Others-Centered	
Save One's Life	Lose One's Life for Gospel	
Acquire the World	Give Up Possessions	
Be Great	Be Least	
Lord Over Others	Be Servant of All	
Be Anxious	Have Faith	
Fear	Courage	
Destructiveness	Saving	
Loyalty to Self	Loyalty to God for the World	

Another way to think of Discipleship is in terms of "Letting Go" in order to "Take Hold" of what God wants us to have or to be (Instructor).

Let Go	Take Hold of	<u>Toda</u> y
Sins	Hope (Forgiveness)	
Fear	Faith	
Rootedness	Follow Jesus	
Possessions	God's Provision	
Old Authorities	Jesus' Authority	
Self-Exaltation	Servanthood	

#### **Conclusions:**

- 1. Why did Jesus have to die? In order to accomplish God's chief purpose for his life to be a "ransom for many" (10:45), thereby revealing fully who he was and what it meant to be God's messiah and servant in the world. (Concept of "ransom" nowhere explained.)
- 2. Why do aspiring disciples have to die (to themselves)? ...in order to take hold of the life that God desires for us and to serve God's purposes in this world.

## **7.3** Small Group Discussion and Integration

- 1. How does Mark's portrayal of Jesus and the Gospel inform your understanding of Jesus and you own theology?
- 2. What questions do you have?

#### Week 8—Matthew

- I. Key Background Information
  - A. Purpose in Context
    - 1. To build up the church
      - a. catechism;
      - b. reassurance (e.g., 28:20);
      - c. exhortation in the face of libertine, "lawless" teachers (7:15-23; 13:36ff.; 22:11-13) = a severe warning (note: "lawless" may have been negative epithet given to anyone who did not share Matthew's understanding of God's will, or who did not do it [Andrew Overman])
    - 2. To clarify and reinforce community priorities: to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33)
      - a. Righteousness is a way of life for Matthew (Matthews thinking is very Jewish. Cf. Paul.)
      - b. What does it mean in practice to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness?
    - 3. Contextually framed purpose: To answer question, "What does Christianity have to do with Judaism?" But it was not a theoretical question.
      - a. The addressees could have been a community of Jewish Christians in Galilee, where "formative Judaism" (predecessor to rabbinic Judaism) was developing and flourishing, and thus was a rival. Perhaps some of the community felt they had made a mistake joining the Christian sect or felt they were being forced to choose between their Jewish faith heritage and their Christian faith.
      - b. If so, Matthew probably wrote his Gospel as "an apology for the church in its struggle with the synagogue" (Blair 238; Overman) both to defend the legitimacy of the Church to the Jews and to be sure the Jewish Christians understand why they should stay with the Church.
      - c. In short, Matthew shows the Church to be Judaism par excellence.
      - [d. Cf. clear message that "this generation" (of Jews, implied) have rejected Kingdom of Heaven; it will be taken from them and given to Gentiles! (21:43; Matt only). Thus Matthew's community might very well be Gentiles with or without Jews.]
- II. Christology: Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Hope of Judaism
  - A. Genealogy (1:1-17)— "Jesus the Messiah"
    - 1. Son of David (heir of royal line—heralding the resumption of dynasty and fulfillment of Davidic covenant?) (1:1) (yet through adoption of Joseph)

- 2. Son of Abraham (heir of initial covenant for Israel)
- 3. Jesus, then, is the long awaited Messiah (1:17)

Matera: Ultimately, Jesus is not Messiah because he was the adopted descendent of (Abraham or) David, but because Jesus is Son of God (1:20-23).

- 4. Note: women in genealogy indicate God's surprising ways to provide redemption for Israel
- B. Jesus' Beginnings and Preparation for Ministry, most <u>in fulfillment of Scripture</u> (1:18-4:16)
  - 1. Virgin Birth in fulfillment of Scripture (1:23)
  - 2. Born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of Scripture (2:1-6)
  - 3. Visited by Magi from the East
  - 4. Lives for awhile in Egypt in fulfillment of Scripture (2:13-15)
  - 5. Herod slaughters the toddlers in fulfillment of Scripture (2:16-18)
  - 6. Jesus finally makes his home in Nazareth in fulfillment of Scripture (2:23)
  - 7. John the Baptist preaches the nearness of the kingdom and calls for repentance in fulfillment of Scripture (3:1-13)
  - 8. Jesus is baptized (3:13-17)
  - 9. Jesus tempted in wilderness; uses Scripture to thwart Satan (4:1-11; Q)
  - 10. Jesus makes his home in Capernaum in fulfillment of Scripture (4:12-16)
- Q. Why is Jesus' fulfillment of Scripture so important? (The prophetic word was sacred in Judaism. Matthew clearly believed that Jesus' fulfillment of messianic-related prophecies would validate his role as messiah to believing Jews. It proved that Christian faith was not a new and thus false religion but was the fulfillment of their hopes from their own tradition.)
- C. Christology: The Person and Identity of Jesus
  - 1. Divine. Supernatural birth in fulfillment of Isa 7:14 (1:18ff), miracles (14:28ff), Father's declaration (3:17; 17:5f.) suggest that Jesus is divine.
  - 2. Promised deliverer: fulfilled many OT prophecies as God's supreme agent, "Christos" (general term in Matt.)
  - 3. Kingdom builder (13:37-43; 16:18; 21:43) as teacher, preacher, healer, "sower" (4:17; 23; 11:5). He also brought division in triumphal effort to bring justice (10:34-36; 12:17-21)

- 4. Judge and ruler of coming kingdom; raised from dead and exalted to authority over universe (25:31-46; 28:18)—King in future (=Son of God, Ps. 2)
- 5. Redeemer (not merely teacher of divine will) (1:21; 18:18; 26:28) as one who forgives sins, as second Moses (2:15). Name "Jesus" = one who saves (rarely used in conversation)
- 6. Superior to Pharisees; his teaching represents <u>true interpretation of the Law</u> (e.g., Matt. 12:1-8; 15:1-20; 22:34-40; see Overman, 78ff.)
- 7. Son of David (1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30f.; 21:9, 15; 22:41-45)
- 8. Revealer of God (11:27)

# III. Discipleship

- A. Requirements of Discipleship
  - **Q.** What is required to be a Disciple of Jesus?
  - 1. Implicit faith in God and Jesus required—Disciples rebuked for little faith 3x (8:26; 14:31; 16:8); but overall, Matt. more positive than Mark; the Twelve do understand and appreciate Jesus' teaching (13:16-17, 51-52; see, too, 14:28-33; cf. Mk 6:56). Matera: Disciples understand in Matthew.
  - 2. Inner goodness as well as legal observance (5:17-48; 6:1-18; 23:23)
  - 3. Imitation of his loving service: faith in action required (9:13; 10:42; 12:7; **25:31-46**). However note that the "least of these" are the apostles on a mission for Christ.
  - N. B. call for "<u>mercy</u>" is a repeated theme and <u>provides "core" value</u> for right interpretation of law for Jesus (based on **Hosea 6:6**). Thus Luke is not only one so concerned.
  - 4. Fidelity in the evangelistic mission (10:16-42; **28:19f.**)
  - 5. The "Church"= the true and truly righteous people of God, entrusted with mysteries of the kingdom of God (Matera, p. 47)
    - a. Only Mathew, among Gospel writers, uses term 'church' (*ekklesia*) for Jesus' followers (16:18; 18:17). *Ekklesia* is Greek term stemming from LXX's translation of Hebrew *qahal* (assembly, congregation); cf. Greek term for Jewish assembly, "synagogue".
    - b. Only Matt. gives instructions of Jesus clearly intended for the post-resurrection church (e.g., 18:15-17)
  - 6. N.B. Some think that the Sermon on the Mount = "basic description of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus" (Pheme Perkins, 226). Options: a. guideline for Jews b. unattainable ideal (to show dependence on God) c. guideline for Christians

7. Basic definition of disciple: those who believed in Jesus as Savior, received his forgiveness, lived a righteous life, and were appointed heirs to the **kingdom of heaven**—if they were and did what Jesus asked. See 7:21-23.

Matera: "Whereas Paul uses 'righteousness' in a theological sense to depict the gift of God to the justified, Matthew employs it in an ethical sense to describe the conduct required of those who belong to the kingdom" (p. 31).

- B. Place of the Old Testament Law in Christian Living?
  - 1. Affirmation of Law and Denunciation of Leading Practitioners—Christians are lawabiding

Overman: Jesus is saying, "Christians most certainly observe the law; don't think they don't!" (per 5:17); the issue is the right interpretation of the law: Jesus had it (everything governed by "core value" of compassion and love [Hosea 6:6]); Pharisees did not.

- a. Breaking the Sabbath to eat grain (Matt 12:1-8 (cf. Mark 2:23-28))—Reasonable Non-Compliance (OT precedent demonstrates that God is more concerned about responding to need than legalistic observance of the law, when one is forced to choose between the two.)
- b. First Things First (Matt 15:1-20 (cf. Mark 7:1-23))—Clean and Unclean

In Matt, Jesus does not change the law, but charges the Pharisees with failing to observe more important aspects of the law and encourages the people to recognize the true meaning behind the laws (15:2, 13f.); whereas Mark interprets the same story to mean that Jesus declared all foods clean (7:19).

c. Love as First Priority (Matt 22:34-40 (cf. Mark 12; Luke 10))—Issue of Jesus' interpretation of law

Only Matthew explicitly adds to Jesus' statement of the love command that "On these two commandments depend the laws and the prophets" (22:40). The law is still valid, but everything must be interpreted through the lens of love of God and neighbor.

Matera: Love = the hermeneutical key for law.

- d. The Law Remains Valid for Jesus' disciples (Matt. 5:17-20)
  - 1) Here Matt. unambiguously commands obedience to the Law (Käsemann, Overman, 87).
  - 2) "What is essential is that the fulfillment of the law is determined by one's interpretation of the law" (87).
  - 3) There are no such parallels in the other Gospels (but cf. James)
- 2. Yet Christianity is not a renewal of the old or a Jews only club
  - a. The Kingdom of Heaven is a new, powerful movement (11:12).

- b. Not an attempt to establish a "Christian Pharisaism"; gospel is for whole world (P. Perkins, 222)
- c. Perhaps Matthew's point is, "It is possible to include Gentiles in the community without abandoning the law as God intended it" (Perkins, 223). TCG: see 21:43
- 3. The Great Commission: What are its distinctive characteristics?
  - a. Clear Commission: to evangelize and make obedient disciples throughout the world (cf. Luke-Acts idea of 12 disciples gathering in Jerusalem awaiting the end of the age).
  - b. Trinitarian and Gospel oriented, yet obedience remains an essential component of the expectations of those who believe and are baptized.

### IV. Eschatology: Parousia and Judgment

- A. Harsh anticipation of judgment is frequent in Matthew.
- B. Son of Man (Jesus) comes to 1) gather elect, 2) bring judgment.
- C. If righteousness is about action, judgment is logical and necessary. Incredible standard to meet, but, at the same time, Jesus' yoke is easy, burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30). Our job both as Christians/followers of Jesus and as interpreters is to understand how *both* statements can be true. (Cf. Matt. 6:33)
- D. No doctrine of justification, but kingdom is work of God.
- V. Applicability of Matthew's form of Christianity Today?
  - A. Some Baptist/Mennonite groups think Sermon on the Mount can be lived out today.
  - B. Historically, Matthew's version of Christianity died out. Is this a negative critique of trying to combine law and gospel? Or is it a passing of a certain "transition stage" in the birthing of the church?
  - C. Protestants maintain it is not possible to fulfill law; and certainly not if it includes radical, internal purity as Jesus called for. Still Sermon on the Mount and Matthew's emphasis on a social Gospel helps us to understand God's values in terms of mercy. Further, his emphasis on issues related to personal faith, active response to the Gospel, and community life remind us that God intends that our faith impacts every area of our lives. Again, righteousness is a way of life! We are accountable for how we live.

## **8.3** Small Group Discussion and Integration

- 1. How does Matthew's portrayal of Jesus and the Gospel inform your understanding of Jesus and you own theology?
- 2. What questions do you have?

#### Week 9—Luke/Acts

### **9.1** Luke

I. Context: Luke as Theologian. Luke wrote his "account" for a particular audience with a specific purpose.

A. Explicitly stated: To present an apology for Christianity to Greek and Roman Christians (i.e., to give an orderly account to reassure those who need reassurance about what they believe—Luke 1:1ff).

Note: Not just a "defense", but an affirmation, clarification, amplification, and explanation of God's work of redemption through Jesus the Messiah.

B. Implicit: To stress the practical, social implications of Jesus' message alongside his spiritual message. (Theme is more dominant in Luke than in Matt., who also stresses mercy and social action for the benefit of other Christians).

## C. Interpretation

- 1. "Literary unity of Luke-Acts and the story it tells is a theological statement about Israel's redemptive history and God's faithfulness to Israel" (Matera, p. 59).
- 2. Yet, is there not also a subversive element to the story of Jesus as it is told? Franciscan Dr. Richard Rohr argues, "In Jesus we have an almost extreme example of God taking sides. It starts with one who empties himself of all divinity (see Philippians 2:6-7), comes as a homeless baby in a poor family, then a refugee in a foreign country, then an invisible carpenter in his own country which is colonized and occupied by an imperial power, ending as a "criminal," accused and tortured by heads of both systems of power, temple and empire, abandoned by most of his inner circle, subjected to the death penalty by a most humiliating and bizarre public ritual, and finally buried quickly in an unmarked grave. If God in any way planned this story line, God surely intended the message to be subversive, clear, and unavoidable. Yet we largely made Jesus into a churchy icon that any priestly or policing establishment could gather around without even blushing."<sup>25</sup>

### II. Special Features

A. Non-Exclusive

- Q. What does "non-exclusive" mean in this context? (Gentiles as well as Jews)
- 1. Simeon: Jesus to be a light for Gentiles too (2:32)
- 2. Jesus' genealogy traced back to Adam (3:38); cf. 2:31f.; 3:6

<sup>25</sup> Richard Rohr, *Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation*, "Bias from the Bottom: Week 1" (March 23, 2016).

- 3. Prophet not accepted in own country (**4:14-30**; cf. Mt 13:35-58). N.B. placement early on in narrative foreshadows story of whole Gospel. They were angry because he spoke of God's preference for those outside of Israel.
- 4. Inclusive message: Repentance and forgiveness to be preached to all nations in the name of Christ (24:47, with Jonah). **Cf.** Matt's perfect righteousness and obedience to Law as well as Christ (4:17; 5:17-20)
- 5. "Whoever is not against you is for you" (9:50, w/ Mk 9:40; opposite phrase @ 11:23, w/ Matt 12:30)
- B. <u>High Value on Those with Low Social Status</u>. God loves everyone, but especially extends mercy and grace to lowly (including women), sick, oppressed, sinners, etc.
  - 1. Elizabeth (barren woman) shown mercy (1:13, 25)
  - 2. Announcement of Savior to Mary (humble woman) (1:48-49)

note: however, women do not speak much in Gospel; Luke is not a modern feminist

- 3. Jesus' ministry to focus on those with physical/social problems, e.g., sermon on the plain (Luke **6:20-21**; cf. Matt 5:3-9).
- 4. However, the concern is not just "physical/material" because Jesus promises Holy Spirit to those who ask (11:13; cf. Matt 7:11)
- C. Special Emphases on Prayer and the Holy Spirit
  - 1. Prayer surrounds key events (3:21; 6:12; 9:18; 9:29; Acts 1:14, 24-26; 8:15; 10:1-16) and is a more common topic for instruction than in the other Gospels (11:1-13; 18:1-14)
  - 2. The Holy Spirit is God's means of working in Jesus and church (see II B 4.)
- D. Key theme: Reversals
  - 1. Part of Mary's prophecy (1:51-53)
  - 2. Jesus' prophetic ministry (6:20-26)
  - 3. Many individuals or groups contrasted
    - 1) Pharisee/tax collector (18:9-14)
    - 2) Wealthy/poor, maimed to banquet (14:15-24)
    - 3) Rich man/Lazarus (16:19-31)
    - 4) Religious leaders/Gentiles (13:28-30)
    - 5) First/last (18:14; 14:11)

- 4. Lowly Jesus becomes Lord and Christ, the one in whom forgiveness is preached (24:47; Acts 2:32-33, 36)
- 5. Rulers, Jerusalem to be humbled (21:20-24; 19:41-44)
- 6. Self-exalted will be humbled; those humbling themselves will be exalted (14:11)
- 7. The kingdom God is among you already (17:20-21), yet still ahead (21:20-33).

### E. Soteriology

- 1. Salvation is now in Jesus' ministry for Israel; through Christ God shows mercy to Israel, gives his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, and guides their feet into the path of peace (1:69-79).
- 2. Salvation through faith in risen Jesus and through Holy Spirit in "end times".
- 3. Salvation consummated when Messiah returns and fully establishes kingdom on earth.

## III. World of Values (adapted from Dave Rhoads work)

## A. Justice via Judgment

- 1. God's pronounces judgment on <u>exploitation</u>, <u>neglect and injustice</u> (12:41-48; 16:19-31).
- 2. Proclamation of kingdom is good news for <u>those who repent</u> and bad news for <u>those who do not</u> (10:8-16; 13:1-5).
- 3. God will right the wrong, vindication is coming, justice will prevail in the end (e.g. 13:22-30; 18:28f.).

## B. Putting God First Leads to Social Justice

- 1. Neglect and oppression stems from <u>wrong priorities</u>: they don't <u>put obedience to God first</u> (6:26; 7:39; 15:1-7; 16:19-31—Rich man and Lazarus). N. B. Uniqueness of Luke: Failure to put God first results in social inequities
- 2. Wealthy singled out: hoarders, exploiters (3:12-14; **6:24-26**; 12:13-21; 16:14, 21; 18:18-30)
- 3. Israel's leaders show arrogant use of power (16:15; 18:14; 3:7-8; 18:11; 4:23-30; cf. 8:14; 19:42; 11:49).

#### C. Mercy

- 1. Jesus, as the one who embodies God's mercy shown to Israel, is the prime example of how we are to treat others.
- 2. Examples of mercy=sign of repentance (3:11-14; 4:19; 19:1-10--Zacchaeus)

3. Only Luke gives instructions to everyone to sell possessions and give alms (12:33f.; cf. Mk 10:21; Matt 6:20). Call is to store treasure in heaven (with Matt 6:20).

#### D. Means of Transition and Transformation

- 1. Jesus' message: God is merciful. We may have salvation through the forgiveness of sins and find the path of peace. Yet, sinners must repent of their sins (1:69-79; 5:32).
- 2. Disciples commissioned with same message--but it is in the name of Christ (9:1-10; 10:1-24; 24:47). Jesus' role does not disappear with his death but expands to that of Lord and Christ (Acts 2:34) in whose name the message of the kingdom continues to be preached.
- 3. God's cataclysmic intervention and judgment, effecting reversals (e.g., 13:1-5)
- 4. While some sort of dramatic eschatological fulfillment of the message is still envisioned (see Luke 21:27), present repentance, including social activism, is the emphasis (21:24-36).
- 5. Acts: Transformation through faith and the Holy Spirit

#### 9.2 Acts

Acts: The Holy Spirit is the power that orients a person toward God, creates Christian community, and enables social inequities to be redressed with mercy; including an egalitarian spirit (ala Acts 4), and inclusive practices (e.g., women prophesy too).

### I. Acts as Theology (Purpose(s))

- A. Acts= a theological "history" devoted to showing
  - 1. The nature and power of the Gospel
  - 2. The vital role of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the Church, as power source and validator of legitimacy (tcg)
  - 3. Christianity as the true Judaism, worthy of respect, protection and acceptance by Gentiles, including Romans.
  - 4. The unimpeded spread of the Gospel (I.H. Marshall)

#### B. Luke-Acts

"Luke-Acts narrates a single story of redemptive history rooted in Israel's story and God's plan of salvation" (Matera, p. 53).

"The story...is a story of a gracious offer of salvation that is rejected and then offered to others. Those who accept...are the reestablished Israel" (p. 56).

C. Main themes of book introduced in first chapter (1:4-8)

- 1. Promise and purpose of Holy Spirit (clothing and empowering to witness)
- 2. Mission: witness to world, beginning in Jerusalem (scope=scope of Matt. commission)
- 3. Hope: Kingdom will be established in future; God will do it; Christ will return

As the Davidic Messiah, the risen Christ is clearly God's faithful provision of redemption of Israel. The Kingdom of God has begun now, to be completed at some point in the future.

- II. Theology (TCG, influenced by M. Hengel; p. numbers refer to M. Hengel, unless referring to Matera)
  - A. God (the Father): "...occupies the dominant place" (Hengel, 91)
  - B. Christology and Redemption (Soteriology)
    - 1. Jesus was not (necessarily) pre-existent; but was a human by God via resurrection (2:22-24, 32-34, 36), and used by God to accomplish God's purposes in unique ways. By emphasizing the divine conception, Luke presents Jesus as a man without peers, and much more than a normal human being (Luke 1:35).

Matera: "Jesus became the Christ of faith, b/c God raised him from the dead" (p. 96).

- 2. TCG: forgiveness clearly through faith in Jesus, but no doctrine of atonement (Acts 13:32f., 38f.).
- 3. <u>Implications?</u> There may have been more than one way in the early church to understand
  - a. the nature of Jesus's sonship (adoption versus pre-existence or divine conception) and
  - b. the means of Jesus's providing for our forgiveness (perhaps it is a *theologia gloria* rather than a *theologia cruxis* in Acts). In any case, <u>Luke affirms Jesus's sonship</u>, <u>Jesus' resurrection</u>, <u>Jesus as a means of justification in a way which the Law could not provide (with Paul)</u>, and that this justification is received through faith/belief.

Matera: "For Luke, the resurrection of Jesus is the decisive event that effects salvation" (p. 96).

- 4. Jesus is the promised Davidic Messiah, a savior for Gentiles and Jews, the one who will redeem Israel –as clearly portrayed from infancy narratives (Luke 1-2) through preaching of apostles (Acts). See Matera, p. 60.
- 5. Resurrected Jesus is enthroned as Messiah, and thus Lord.

Matera: "Moral life begins with repentance that leads to faith, baptism, and new life defined by the gift of the Spirit" (Matera, 84)

C. Becoming a Christian. No "systematic teaching on how one becomes a Christian" except we know *metanoia* is required, and *pisteusai*. Note: the gift of the Holy Spirit comes with repentance and belief, and the promise extends to children (which provides the basis for infant baptism and including the children of believers in the covenant community). See **Acts 2:38f.** 

Matera: Repentance =

- 1. Inhabitants of Jerusalem: believe in the one they rejected
- 2. For Gentiles: turn to living God
- 3. For Diaspora Jews and God-fearers: turn to Jesus as the Messiah
- 4. All: Do deeds consistent with repentance (Acts 26:18, 20)
- D. Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)
  - 1. A "gift every Christian receives at baptism," for the most part
  - 2. The "equipment possessed by individual Christians for a given task at a particular moment,"
  - 3. That which "gives specific direction for the Christian mission at important junctures" (92-93).
  - 4. TCG: However, there were some exceptions reported re: baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Some did not receive Spirit when baptized in name of Jesus.
  - 5. <u>Implications for today?</u>
    - a. Holy Spirit is essential to the spiritual life of the believer
    - b. However Acts is "descriptive" rather than "prescriptive." Thus there is not a mandate that everyone has an identical experience of the Holy Spirit.
    - c. For doing New Testament Theology, Paul's more specific teaching on life in the Spirit should take precedence over Acts's narratives. In forming one's opinion about the role of the Holy Spirit in one's life and in the Church, various gifts and the general fruit of the Holy Spirit are key, whereas speaking in tongues is minor in the long run and not necessarily available to all (I Cor 12; Gal 5:22f.). Cf. Pentecostal and some charismatic teachings are based on universalizing the descriptive account in Acts.
    - d. At the same time, many report that a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit has been transformative for their relationship with God and their ability to minister effectively for Christ. Likewise, praying in tongues is a meaningful way for many Christians to communicate with God.

### III. Ecclesiology

- A. Rituals and Practices: Believers were baptized and devoted themselves to apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer (Acts 2:42)
- B. Social Implications of faith: Communal type of living—sharing in common, meeting needs of one another, ongoing fellowship and corporate worship (Acts 2:43-47).

Matera: "Luke makes correct use of possessions a measure of discipleship" (Luke 12:13-15, 16-21, 22-34; 16:1-3, 14, 19-31; 18:18-30; Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35) (p. 86)

- C. Evangelism. Preaching Gospel and Conversions were regular part of Christian community (e.g., Acts 2:47)
- D. Inclusive: Gentiles were eventually accepted alongside Jews, b/c Jews rejected message repeatedly (Acts 10, 15)
- E. Split from Jews as a result of the rejection by the Jews of the Christian message (Stephen, the Pauline pattern of beginning in the synagogue, yet being driven out time after time with the result that he went to the Gentiles)
- F. Significance of Luke-Acts = "its narrative theology that inscribes the story of Jesus and the church into the story of Israel, and the writings of Paul, Peter, James, and John into the story of the church" (Matera, p. 97).

# 9.3 Small Group Discussion and Integration

- 1. How does Luke's portrayal of Jesus and the Gospel inform your understanding of Jesus and you own theology?
- 2. What is one question that arises for you from the Gospel of Luke and Acts?

## Week 10—Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God (The Gospel of John)

## 10.1 John—A Theological Interpretation of Jesus' Life and Ministry

- I. Context and Purpose(s) of the John's Gospel
  - A. To present Jesus as the Divine Logos who has brought Light into a dark world (1:1-4)

Note: A different starting point: the incarnation. Cf. starting with proclamation of kingdom (Synoptics), or oral kerygma rooted in death and resurrection of Jesus (Paul)

- B. Primarily Evangelistic: to convince readers of Jesus' divinity and messiahship via signs (1:14; **20:30-31**; cf. 19:35)
- C. Signs are given so that people will "see" Jesus for who he truly is, the Messiah and Son of God.
  - 1. Two kinds of seeing: Physical seeing (John 9) and Heart seeing (= believing).
  - 2. The goal of seeing and believing: Readers may experience eternal life (both quality and quantity of life)
- D. Context Options
  - 1. Perhaps, John also wrote to console and encourage the Johannine community, which had experienced excommunication from the Jewish synagogues (Robert Kysar).
  - 2. He may have written to refute Gnostic ideas. (See Harris, 146f.; but cf. Drane, 192ff., who indicates that John's "gnostic" sounding ideas may fit even better with some of those found in Dead Sea Scrolls relating to the Qumran community, e.g., light/darkness = *ethical* rather than metaphysical dualism.)
- F. Matera: Jesus' mission was "revelation" of what he has seen and heard in the Father's presence (p. 262) TCG: I agree, but what is the goal of this revelation? That is, while it is true that Jesus' mission included revealing what he has seen and heard from the Father, we must add that the reason he is revealing this is so that God's children may see and believe truth, which will lead to eternal life.
- II. John's Worldview: The Nature of Reality and Dualism
  - A. Light vs. Darkness (key motifs in John)
    - 1. Radical division between light and darkness (e.g., 1:4-5; **3:19-21**), truth vs. deceit, and goodness vs. evil
    - 2. Plot of Gospel is a <u>movement from light (creation) to darkness (the world prior to Christ) to light in and through Christ (1:4)</u>. Spirit of God is essential to transformation (John 3). Jesus' purpose is to give eternal life, which means to know the only true God (17:3).
    - 3. The story of the healing of the blind mind is the hermeneutical key to John (9:1-41). Only Jesus can open our blind eyes. Those who think they see are blind (the Jews who cannot believe in Jesus as the Son of God). Salvation is a matter of coming out of the darkness into the light, of seeing the truth that is revealed in and by Jesus.

#### B. Good vs. Evil

- 1. In Judaism, there is limited dualism: God is more powerful than Satan.
- 2. In Early Christianity, the events of Jesus's life defeated sin and evil—but the battle goes on within the life of each believer, who must draw on the Spirit and use the armor of God to win the daily spiritual battle (e.g., Luke 10:18f.; Rom 8:2-4; Eph 6:10-13).
- 3. In John's view, the battle between good and evil is an ongoing battle between God the Father and the Devil. The Devil is the father of lies. He is also the Father of those who believe his lies (e.g., Jewish religious leaders who cannot see that Jesus is the Son of God). Yet, the darkness is not able to overwhelm the light of Jesus.
- C. John's Context: Dialogue with Gnosticism

Brief characteristics of Gnosticism: duality; spirit is good, eternal; flesh is evil; secret knowledge is given to initiates. Gnostics would have denied that Jesus came in the flesh.

- 1. Similarities between Christianity and Gnosticism
  - a. Christ's divine pre-existence
  - b. "Knowing" Father God and Son = "eternal life" (17:3)
  - c. Spirit gives life, while flesh is useless (6:63)
  - d. spiritual rebirth (John 3)
- 2. Differences between Christianity and Gnosticism
  - a. John "insists on Jesus' physical humanity" (1:14)
  - b. Jesus' displays fleshly wounds after resurrection (chaps. 20-21)
  - c. Soldier pierces Jesus' side, confirming physical death (chap. 20)
- III. Christology: Who is Jesus according to John?
- **Q.** How does Jesus' identity in John stand in contrast to the portrayals found in the other three Gospels? (Jesus is almost equated with God; Jesus is the lamb of God; the metaphors: Jesus as bread, door, shepherd, etc.)
  - A. Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish Messianic expectations, including both the political and suffering servant role. John's account undoubtedly inspired the Christmas hymn, "What Child is This?" (Cf. John 19)

### <u>Titles and Designations of Christ in John 1</u>

- 1. The Word (Logos) (1:1, 14)
- 2. Creator (1:3)
- 3. True light (1:4-9)
- 4. Came from the Father (1:14)
- 5. Christ (1:20)
- 6. The prophet (1:21, 25; see, too, 4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17) Note: in chap. 1, it is unclear what "prophet" they were waiting for; cf. selection of prophet in Deut. 18:1. (John is

- also a prophet, equated with Elijah (1:21, 25)—the prophet who was to precede the messiah; appears only here and only in reference to John (based on Mal. 4:5).
- 7. The Lord (1:23)
- 8. The lamb of God (1:29, 36)—only here in chap. 1. Meaning? "The Lamb takes away sins of world." (See Isa. 53:7. Also John is the one who places Jesus' last supper on the day before the Passover, i.e., at the same time when the Passover lamb was traditionally slain.)
- 9. Existed prior to incarnation—"The one who is before me" (1:30)
- 10. The Son of God (1:34; see, too, 11:27; 20:31; context: confessions)
- 11. The King of Israel (1:49; see, too, 12:13, where it is used as a positive, triumphal reference = messianic)
- 12. The Son of Man (Humanity or eschatological figure of Daniel 7:13; John 1:51)

#### B. Jesus is the Son of God

- 1. Unique relationship: "One" with God (17:5, 24; 5:17f., 14:9) and God's only Son (1:14; 3:16, 18); loved by God (3:35; 5:20; 15:9; 17:23, 24, 26). Issue—what kind of union with God does John have in mind? Is it an ontological union (that is, one in "being" with God) or a love union (that is, one in "heart")? Since believers can share in this union (14:20, 23; 17:21-23), it seems like Jesus could not have meant that humans are one in being with God (at least not at this point in discourses).
- 2. Subordinate to and dependent on the Father (14:28; 5:30; 6:38; 8:29, 42; 10:36; 11:42; 13:20; 17:3; 14:10, 31)
- 3. Work of Son is the same as Father: to give life (5:21; 6:35; 11:35; etc.) and to pass judgment on them (5:22, 27, 30; 9:39-41) Yet, cf. 3:17; 12:48.
- 4. Compare: Other uses of the concept of the son(s) of God or sons of the Most High found in Old Testament, where the reference is to human beings who are not divine in any sense. Examples: Genesis 6:2; Psalm 82:6. In ancient Israel, the title "son of God" may refer to a "designated (human) agent of God". Example: David, as anointed King of Israel, was appointed as "son" of God (Psalm 2:7).

#### C. Jesus is the Son of Man

- 1. 13x noted (e.g., 1:51; 3:13-15; 5:27-29; 6:62; 8:28; 9:39-41; 12:23; 11:52)
- 2. Greek and oriental parallels: "heavenly, ideal man, a glorious Adam, ... who would descend at last to fallen earth and restore people to the blessedness they had lost" (Blair, 256). Cf. 1 Cor 15:45-49; 1 Enoch; 2 Esdras.
- 3. Cf. "Son of Man" in Ezekiel, where the term refers to a human being (e.g., 3:1); see, too, Daniel (7:13; 8:17)
- D. Jesus is the Word and the Wisdom of God
  - 1. Especially seen in the Prologue (1:1-4, 14-18)

- 2. John mixes Greek thought (*Logos*) and Judaism (Wisdom): Jesus pre-existed with God; served as agent in creation; descended to earth to dwell among Jewish people; revealed the mind and purposes of God; sought out disciples; experienced both acceptance and rejection; brought life and light to believers and death and judgment to unbelievers (Blair, 256).
- 3. One unique point: John "alone declares that the Word (or Wisdom) 'became flesh' (1:14)" to reveal and redeem those who **see** his glory and **believe** (1:14,18; 2:11; 17:22; cf. 20:29).
- 4. Jesus' words are spirit and life (6:62).
- 5. Jesus claimed to exist before Abraham and alludes to his identification with Yahweh: I AM (8:58).
- E. Special Feature: Focus on "I" self-references
  - 1. Matt (17); Mark (9); Luke (10); John (118)
  - 2. The difference here is not only statistical, but qualitative; see especially the 8 "I am" statements (6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1; 8:58) = motif. Practical spirituality today: To see Jesus, we must know who he is and what to look for.

### <u>10.2</u>

- IV. Additional Key Theological Themes in John
  - A. Soteriology
    - 1. God sent his son to save. Belief in Jesus, the Savior, and be born again of the Spirit (John 3:3-8, 16-17). **Read John 3:1-21.**
    - 2. Jesus must be lifted up (crucified) (3:14f., 12:32-33).
    - 3. Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (1:29).
    - 4. The Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (10:11, 14-18)
  - B. Faith and Eternal Life in John
    - 1. Eternal life: "Eternal life refers to quality of life in relation with Jesus and God, which can be experienced fully in the present and which continues beyond death."
    - 2. Key aspects of eternal life:
      - a. regarding for whom: for those who believe in Jesus and in God, the Father; those who eat Jesus' flesh and blood, and follow Jesus:
        - 3:15, 16; 5:24; 6:29, 40; 20:31 Whoever believes (in Jesus and God) has eternal life. Cf. 5:28-29, verses that refer to judgment according to doing good vs. evil; with Rev. 20:12; Romans 2.

- 5:21 Son gives life to whomever he wishes.
- 6:53 Those who eat flesh of Son of Man and drink his blood

Symbolic? Consider RCC concept of transubstantiation, where the bread and wine mystically become the real body and blood of Jesus in the Mass (Matera, p. 56).

- 8:12 Whoever follows Jesus will have light of life.
- 8:51 Whoever obeys my word will never see death!
- 11:25 I am the resurrection and the life; anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die.
- 12:25 Those who hate their life will keep it for eternal life.
- b. regarding timing: a present reality
  - 3:36 Whoever believes has eternal life.
  - 5:24 Whoever hears Jesus' word and believes God *has* eternal life and has crossed over from death unto life.
- c. regarding nature of eternal life: nourishing, everlasting, abundant, and connected to knowing God:
  - 4:14, 7:37-39 Water from Jesus gushes up to eternal life; living water = the Holy Spirit.
  - 6:62 Spirit gives life.
  - 10:10 Life is abundant.
  - 11:26 Life is everlasting.
  - 12:50 The father's commandment is eternal life (meaning?).
  - \*17:3 Eternal life = knowing the Father/the only true God and

Jesus Christ whom the Father has sent.

- 3. Complementary motifs: Jesus is the bread of life (6:35), the way, the truth, and the life (14:6), the vine (15:1), etc. What is the message in this teaching of Jesus? (Jesus is the source of life and spiritual vitality, apart from which humans will not have nourishment or life.)
- 4. "Seeing" is believing. Story of blind man = hermeneutical key to John (9:1-41)
- C. Eschatology:

Overview: John holds to a "now and more ahead" eschatology (cf. Paul: "now and not yet"); almost a *realized eschatology*.

- 1. Whoever believes has eternal life (3:36; 5:24)
- 2. Yet judgment and resurrection of the dead still ahead (5:25-29; 11:24f.; cf. Daniel re: all resurrected, but some to life, others to condemnation)
- 3. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of the world will be driven out (12:31); yet Jesus did not come to judge, and judgment is still ahead on the "last day" (12:48)

# D. Discipleship in John

- 1. Disciples are born again/from above by the Spirit (3:3, 5).
- \* Belonging to God enables one to hear God; this means recognizing Jesus as Son of God, loving Jesus, believing Jesus, and obeying Jesus (8:31-32, 42-47).
- 2. Disciples believe in Jesus as the Son of God.
  - a. This is will of God: to believe and have eternal life (6:40).
  - b. This is the key to eternal life (3:15f.; 5:24; 11:26).
  - c. Hold to Jesus' teaching; the truth will set you free (8:31-32).
- 3. Disciples remain/abide in him.
  - a. Eating flesh of Son of Man and drinking his blood (6:53f.) = key passage for RCC teaching on transubstantiation; Lutherans, Anglicans, and Presbyterians believe in real presence of Christ in Eucharist (consubstantiation); Baptists interpret this passage symbolically (no real presence in elements).

Comment: Impossible to understand John 6 pre-resurrection. If only symbolic, why did people turn away? But how does teaching fit with 6:61-63?

- b. Remaining in the vine = remaining in Jesus (15:4ff.).
- 4. Disciples bear much fruit by abiding in him (i.e., not own effort) (15:5, 8, 16).

Cf. ministry and life in the Spirit (1 Cor 12; Eph 4; Gal 5).

- 5. Disciples must obey the one great command: love one another (15:12-13, 17)—and must have love of God within (5:42).
- 6. Disciples will have to endure hatred and persecution from "the world" (15:18-25; 16:1).
- 7. Disciples will testify on behalf of Jesus (15:27).

- E. An odd belief—that Jesus had been raised from the dead.
  - 1. There was a belief in the resurrection at the time of Jesus, but it was in the *final* resurrection. Thus, "the unusual feature about the Christian claim was their belief that Jesus *alone* had been raised *before* the end" (Dunn, 73).
  - 2. The first Christians believed that with Jesus' resurrection, the general resurrection had already begun (1 Cor 15:20-23; see Mtt 27:52-53).
  - 3. Conclusion: A unique explanation for a unique event.

## **10.3** Small Group Discussion and Integration

- 1. How does John's portrayal of Jesus and the Gospel inform your understanding of Jesus and you own theology?
- 2. What is stirred within you (both intellectually and personally) by John's theology?
- 3. What questions do you have about his theology?

## Week 11—Christianity as an Extension of Judaism

All New Testament theologians understood the teaching of Jesus Christ and the Gospel as an extension or fulfillment of Judaism, but three of the NT writers construct their writings with Judaism as a clear backdrop: Matthew's Gospel, Hebrews and James.

### 11.1 Hebrews

### I. Background

- A. Authorship. The Early Church attributed the letter to the Hebrews to Paul, but few modern scholars hold this view.<sup>26</sup> The author was familiar with Paul, and his theology is compatible with Paul's, but he was some anonymous writer held in esteem in his day but whose identity is lost to us today.
- B. Genre. Hebrews reads like a sermon, with some real-life situations in the background. There is a clear argument with vitally important exhortations and grave warnings for the readers.
- C. Dating. 3. In any case, the "near quote" of Hebrews by Clement of Rome in his letter dated c. 96 A.D. (F.F. Bruce, 1990, pp. 13, 21), sets the outer limit for Hebrews to be the end of the first century.

# II. Key Theological Emphases

# A. Christology

- 1. Hebrews demonstrates the superiority of Jesus Christ (to angels, to Moses, to sacrifice of animals) within the context of recipients who are in danger of lapsing from the Christian faith back to Judaism. **Read 1:1-4**
- 2. Maintains a very high Christology (i.e., the understanding of Christ's person, qualities, and work as "prophet, priest, and king". Christology in Hebrews is almost as high as that found in John's writings.)
- 3. Jesus is the unique Son of God.
- B. Soteriology: Provides a clear statement of the doctrine of atonement against Jewish backdrop
  - 1. Underlying conviction of author: The NT is built upon Old Testament themes (cf. Epistle of Barnabas, in which Barnabas argues that the Jews have misunderstood OT, i.e., they shouldn't have taken Leviticus commands literally, but allegorically. Bruce Metzger: makes Scripture "a wax nose that can be twisted in any direction" [Hebrews class notes, 2/2/83]).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> See Appendix 6 for a brief comparison of Paul's theology and writings to what we find in Hebrews.

2. The writer affirms what Judaism taught, "without blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:18, 22).<sup>27</sup>

# C. Practical Theology

- 1. The author addresses the problem of moral laxity and persecution in church.
  - a. For those who are rebelling against God, by sinning and hardening their hearts, he warns them of God's judgment, without ever defining exactly where the point of no return might be. (Hebrews 10:26-31; 12:14-17; 13:4)
  - Cf. teaching on unforgiveable sin (Matt 12:31; 2 Tim; 1 John 5:16)
- 2. Hebrews also addresses the problem of the lapsed, i.e., those who renounced or abandoned their faith. (Hebrews **6:4-12**)
  - a. The author's solution was that there was no possibility of return or repentance for such individuals.
  - b. Compare to the solution in the mid-second century, prior to A.D. 150, when the Shepherd of Hermas's solution was to allow one repentance.
- 3. Positively, he calls the readers to faith and perseverance.
  - Key exhortations: 4:16; 10:19-25, **35-39**; **11:1**, **6**; **12:1-3**, 7-12; 13:5-6
- III. The Old Testament background to Hebrews

Exodus 19-20; 23-24; 39:42-40:38

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Leviticus 1; 4; 16; 19:2; 22:32

- A. The atonement theology of Hebrews is built on the Levitical cultus, and the writer sees the Christian covenant as growing out of the Mosaic covenant. The sacrifice of blood is essential for forgiveness. (9:18-22)
- B. The writer does not invalidate the old law and cult (e.g., 2:1-4), but stresses its inadequacy to do what Christ and the new covenant can do.
- C. The new covenant and Jesus' ministry were considered by Early Christians to be fulfillments of OT prophecies, esp. Jeremiah 31, select Psalms (e.g., 2, 45, 102, 104, 110 in chap. 1 alone; see Bruce, p. 28, for all Psalms used), and Isaiah 53.

Conclusions on Hebrews: The letter/sermon emphases: Superiority of Jesus as prophet, priest, and king and of new covenant to old covenant. It is a message of grace through our Lord Jesus's sacrifice and priesthood and through God's loving discipline. It is a

 $<sup>^{27}</sup>$  See Appendix 7 for a brief response to John Hick's views based on the theology of Hebrews and Paul.

warning against apostasy and rebellion, but also an encouragement to simply rest in God's promise, persevering to the end in faith, living by hope, joy, and thanksgiving while we wait for the fulfillment of God's promises.

## IV. Significance of Hebrews for understanding contextualization

Hebrews is an excellent example of putting the Gospel in language (concepts, terms) that would be understood in a particular context. The entire presentation assumes Jewish readers who are very familiar with the Jewish faith, traditions, and history.

The question raised for theologians, pastors, and evangelists today is: Should Hebrews be taken as *the* way to understand the meaning of Jesus' life and death, or just *one* way? Are we free to talk about the meaning of Jesus' person, death, and ministry in completely different terms that would be better understood in our contexts? For example, for those who know nothing about priests, high priests, animal sacrifice and temples, would it be better to hear about God's saving work through Christ in different metaphors? If so, how will we know if the metaphors we choose are still faithful to Christ and the Gospel?

## **11.2** James

#### I. Introduction

In James, we see a decidedly Jewish perspective that understands Christian identity primarily in communal terms. As in Matthew and Hebrews, James sees our identity as something created by God's initiative and brought into existence through the covenants, tracing back to Abraham. No one is in relationship with God in a vacuum. We are part of a community of believers, even a family of God, comprised of brothers and sisters sharing the same covenant with God.

Despite differences in emphases among various biblical writers, all agree that building our "spiritual house" (identity) requires both reliance on God and human faith and effort. Believers must rely on the grace and activity of God for forgiveness and even the ability to believe in God's promises. At the same time, true believers must live by faith, be obedient to God's will, and fulfill covenant requirements, including doing good work. However, the various writers emphasize different aspects of these truths differently due to wanting to address concerns (misunderstandings, confusion, laxity, etc.) in their particular contexts.

# II. James' Theological Issues

- A. Frank Matera: James poses the biggest challenge to the unity of the New Testament. For Luther, the challenge was so great that he wanted to reject James altogether from the NT.<sup>28</sup>
- B. Chief Theological Issue: The teaching of James appears to either contradict or seriously conflict with Paul's doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. His emphasis on works and his stance on faith without works in 2:14ff. suggest a complete ignorance of the Pauline polemical intent of his theology.

A likely hypothesis is that James knew of the early tradition of the doctrine of faith apart from works that Paul championed, but was not specifically acquainted with Paul's writings, if they had even been written yet. Thus he was not attacking Paul *per se*, but attacking in a different way the same kinds of people who twisted Paul's teaching to interpret the doctrine of grace as a premise for licentiousness (similarly, Raymond Martin, 13). In the absence of any clear Christology or soteriology (it appears assumed), <u>James should be read as a corrective and not as an alternative theological tradition on par with Paul's formulation of justification by grace through faith.</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> On James's place in the Canon: James, 1-2 Peter and Hebrews were not included in the Muratorian Canon of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century (perhaps A.D. 170; perhaps centuries later). The current 27 books were first grouped together in the Greek Church in a festal letter by Athanasius of Alexandria in 367 A.D. Augustine (born 354), in the treatise *De doctrina christiana*..."gives our present list of NT books (but places James at the end of the Catholic Epistles, thus giving Peter the first place)..." (Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 236). Augustine was probably responsible for getting James into the Roman canon. Luther rejected James' status as apostolic, because it doesn't promote Christ and emphasizes works. Meanwhile, at the Council of Trent (4/8/1546), the Roman Catholic Church declared James to be Holy Scripture, though deutero-canonical.

## C. Heart of James' Theology

- 1. In spite of James's well-known emphasis on works, faith is still critical to his spirituality. Faith is the key to handling trials, overcoming doubt, receiving wisdom from God, living out true religion, acting in ways that demonstrate a belief in one's ultimate accountability to God, receiving forgiveness and healing. Yet it is clear that "faith" is not mere intellectual assent. Belief in God is certainly important, but faith must show itself practically, and Christians are expected to keep maturing in their faith.
- 2. The thrust of James is largely on the practical outworking of faith (**Read 1:26-27**): care for the needy and treatment of others in accordance with "the law of liberty," which heralds mercy over judgment (2:12-13). Faith without works is not a true (saving) faith. **Read: 2:14-19**
- 3. Grace and a gracious God are presupposed. God is the giver of all good gifts (1:17) and is compassionate and merciful (4:11). We depend upon the law of liberty and mercy (2:12-13). God's grace is the means by which we overcome the tendency of our spirits to pursue friendship with the world (4:6). Humble submission to God (not merit) is the basis for our hope in God's lifting us up (4:10). Forgiveness is available to those who seek it (5:15; cf. 5:20).
- 4. James calls for faith and patience in the midst of hardships, because God produces maturity through trials and answers the prayer of faith (1:2-8, 12-15).
- 5. Liberation theological point of view: James's social consciousness condemns oppression and offers hope. Tamez: "One of the basic purposes of the author is to inspire hope in the suffering Christian communities and perhaps in the poor who are not members of those communities but happen to read or know of this letter" (34); "the poor and oppressed rejoice because they hear the good news of a promise of liberation" (33). See James 5:1-6.
- 6. True religion issues forth in impartiality, fairness, mercy, compassion, rejection of the world's values and lifestyle, patient endurance, hope in the midst of suffering, and faith in the miraculous.
- 7. James and Buddhism have a lot in common in terms of stressing practical, moral behavior. However, there are significant differences in their different views of human identity and the role of God.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> See Appendix 8, "James and Buddhism."

# Competing Models for Building One's "Spiritual House"

**PAUL** 

**Roof** Real Hope versus No Hope

**House** Works, Grace, Love Works, Works

**Foundation** Grace of God Works (my efforts)

Trust in God/Christ Reliance on self

Ephesians 2:8-10 Romans 3:19-20

Result: Salvation Condemnation

**JAMES** 

**Roof** Solid Hope versus Vain Hope

**House** Work + Faith [Empty]

**Foundation** Faith = Works Faith alone (without works)

James 2:20-26 (Intellectual assent)

Trust in belief alone

James 2:14-19

Result: Justification Judgment

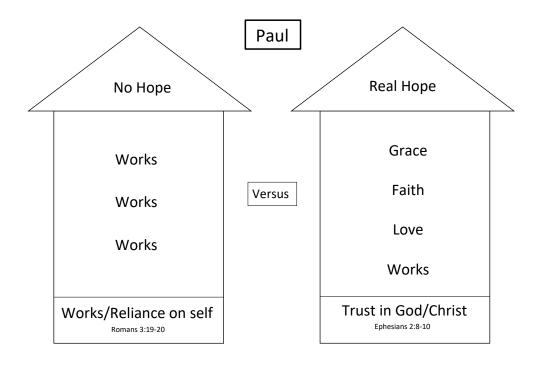
Biblical writers were addressing different contexts, and thus their emphases were different.

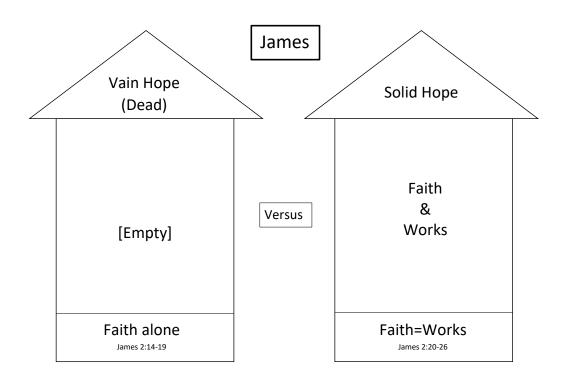
- Paul is often in dialogue with Judaizers.
- James is in dialogue with those who misunderstand Paul's Gospel of salvation by grace through faith.

See diagram on next page.

## 11.3 Small Group Discussion and Integration

- 1. How does James's teaching on the role of works in salvation influence your theology and ethics?
- 2. In Myanmar (or in your particular ethnic context), what needs to be emphasized more: trusting in the grace of God by faith, or demonstrating one's faith by good deeds and loving care for others? Why?





## Week 12—New Testament Theology Amid Persecution and Suffering

# **12.1** 1 Peter

I. The Theological Responses to the Persecution of the First Century AD

A. Historical Context: Persecution of Christians in the First Century A.D.

Throughout the New Testament there are many clear evidences that Christians were undergoing persecution and should expect persecution. The teachings in the Gospels and Acts, written between A.D. 65 and 90, "take for granted a continuous opposition and persecution . . ."<sup>30</sup>

At first, Christianity was viewed by Rome as a Jewish sect. Consequently, it benefited from the same protection and exceptions allowed to it by Roman law. However, as it became increasingly clear that Christianity was not a Jewish sect, and due to the nature of the Gospel and the implications of it, hostilities arose from various camps.

B. Theological Responses to Suffering: At the end of the first century, the authors of 1 Peter and Revelation offer the two major theological responses to persecution in the New Testament.

#### 1. Revelation

Persecution is inevitable and unavoidable; so endure and look for God's deliverance. The Revelation belongs to the period of Domitian's rule. The portrayal of the Beast uttering blasphemies and calling for worship possibly refers to Domitian. John reports at least one known martyr in Pergamum (2:13), but the reference to the coming resurrection of martyrs who died because of their faithful witness surely indicates that others had died. At least, if nothing else, John of Patmos expected further persecution and deaths. His vision would have been received by Christians who along with him perceived the threats of Rome as real and terrifying.

#### 2. 1 Peter

The oppression of I Peter appears to refer to that incurred from the pagan society, while Revelation clearly has political rulers in Rome in mind. 1 Peter recognized that Christians had provoked opposition by their removal of themselves from the usual pagan way of life (4.3f.). Some conflict with pagans was unavoidable, but, at the same time, Peter urges Christians to be accommodating where possible. Thus, Peter urges the Christians to maintain good conduct among the Gentiles (2:12) and to be subject to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Leonhard Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, 110.

every human institution including the emperor, governors, masters (for slaves), and husbands (for wives).

This teaching was not contrived to appease the pagans, since the author of 1 Peter was clearly against any conformity or compromise that would violate Christian values. However, since moral, traditional living was simultaneously appropriate for Christians and pagans, "Peter" brings up these issues (3:13-17) in order to help the Christians avoid any unnecessary persecution. In addition, adherence to these mutual values would serve the purpose of witness, which was another important priority for the Christian in this epistle. Finally, where suffering was unavoidable, Peter sought to interpret their experiences positively, i.e., as a blessing, a cause for rejoicing, in sharing in Christ's sufferings, etc. (4:19; 5:8-11).

# II. Four-fold Purpose of 1 Peter

- A. "Peter" wrote to help the community define itself as a "household of God", different from, but not inferior to non-believing neighbors who [may have] had a higher social status (Elliot).
- B. To help Christians to avoid unnecessary persecution
- C. To teach Christians to serve as a witness in the world by living orderly lives, following the customs of the society where they do not conflict with God's ways (e.g., submission to authorities, order in home), and doing good deeds; and
- D. To reinterpret positively the suffering they could not avoid, i.e., as a blessing and a cause for rejoicing because they were sharing in Christ's sufferings.

#### III. Peter's Teaching for Christians Living in a Hostile Pluralistic Context

Peter contextualizes Paul's teaching on growing in Christ for Christians who were marginalized by the broader, religiously pluralistic society and sometimes even persecuted for their faith.<sup>31</sup> In the face of such hardship and danger, he urged Christian believers to go deeper into their own relationship with God in Christ, to strengthen their self-understanding as the people of God, and to prepare themselves intellectually as well as spiritually, morally, and behaviorally so that their witness to their largely nonChristian neighbors would be more clear, vibrant and persuasive.<sup>32</sup> They were not to shy away from suffering for Christ. Yet, at the same time, they should avoid unnecessary persecution (that which comes from outright rebellion or immoral behavior) and live exemplary lives for all to see. He urged them to "live such good lives among the pagans though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Pet. 2:12).

<sup>31 1</sup> Pet. 1:5; 2:4, 11; 3:14; 4:12-16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> 1 Pet. 1:13-16; 2:5, 9-17, 19-21; 3:8-16.

To live up to our calling and to the demands of serving Christ requires ongoing spiritual growth and development. So, Peter says, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may *grow up* in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Peter 2:2-3, NIV, emphasis added). Peter writes elsewhere, "*grow* in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18, NIV, emphasis added). He knows well that his readers already have experienced the grace of God and know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. Yet, he also knows that the Christian faith calls us to keep growing in our knowledge and experience of God in ever-new and more meaningful ways.

## III. Theological Emphases in 1 Peter Read 1:1-2.

- A. Perspectives on Christian Identity (1 Peter 1:1-2)
  - 1. Christians are the "Elect" (cf. Pauline language of election in Rom 9)
  - a. Election is for **sanctification** (cf. Rom 8:29), which leads to or effects "**obedience** and **sprinkling of blood**" (metaphor is from rite after pledge of fidelity to Yahweh: Exodus 24:7-8). Thus, the election of God of Christians is based on the Jewish covenant, whereby Yahweh initiates the relationship by choosing his people, who, in turn, were called to pledge their faith and obedience to him. Blood was used to ratify or seal the covenant. After the initial establishment of the covenant, blood was used to renew the covenant when there had been violations of it. Thus we can understand the connection between the shedding of blood and forgiveness, and the NT concept of the blood of the covenant.
  - b. Who were the recipients of Peter's letter? How did it affect his theology?
    - 1.) Literally translated, Peter's readers were the "alongside the people there" (the *parepidemoi*), i.e., resident aliens (1:1; 2:11). John Elliot seizes upon the term to argue from a sociological perspective that Peter is addressing a certain "underclass" group, at least non-citizens in foreign countries. Elliot maintains that Peter was not alluding to an earthly "pilgrimage" (*Home for the Homeless*, 45).
    - 2.) Lightfoot, Selwyn, et al. argue that Peter's use of "sojourners" and "resident aliens/foreigners" was metaphorical. Christians don't belong in this world. They are just passing through, as travelers would do.
    - 3.) Thus, interpretive question: Are these Christians actually resident aliens or is this metaphorical language describing the nature of the Christian church? or both? If it is the former, then this letter may speak more powerfully to those who feel marginalized by society. If it is the latter, it may be a word of challenge to those who might not see their call to be Christian witnesses in society.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Biak Uk Lian (MIT, class of 2017) wrote his thesis on 1 Peter, and found many parallels between the experiences and circumstances of suffering of Peter's audience and that of ethnic minorities in Myanmar.

- 2. Christian identity rooted in the Trinity (1:2)
- a. Destined by God the Father
- b. Sanctified by the Spirit
- c. To be obedient to Jesus Christ...
- B. Ecclesiology: Christian corporate identity (2:1-10)
  - 1. A chosen people/the elect (2:9)
  - 2. A royal priesthood
  - 3. A holy nation
  - 4. A people belonging to God (or, God's special possession)

Peter's soteriology: they were called out of darkness into light.

- 5. People with a purpose: "to declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (teleology)
- 6. Recipients of the mercy of God (2:10)

What are the implications of this ecclesiology? (Regardless of one's status in society, Christians are to view themselves as God sees them: High status, significant role in life)

- C. Call to Maintain Social order (2:13-3:7)
  - 1. Submission to rulers and masters/authorities
  - 2. Wives and husbands

Thus, Peter is socially conservative. He places a higher value on witness to the nonbelieving society than on trying to change society.

- D. Suffering for doing good (3:8-22; 4:12-19)—There is a blessing for such suffering.
- E. Living for God is our calling (Ethics)
  - 1. Be holy (1:13-2:2) **Read 1:13-16.**

Note: Two meanings of "holy" for ancient Israel, in the Old Testament

- 1) Covenant people, who were set apart by God from their neighbors to worship and serve Yahweh.
- 2) Covenant people, whose moral conduct was to reflect God's standards and to be faithful to the covenant. Thus, they were set apart from their neighbors by their behavior.
- 2. Be done with sin (4:1-11)

# IV. Interpretation for Today<sup>34</sup>

- A. Peter's teaching on how Christians should respond in the face of marginalization, misunderstanding, ignorance, and even persecution in a religiously pluralistic context was to neither hide from nor belligerently fight against those who oppose or mistreat them. He didn't advise them to change their theology or view themselves as inferior to the majority and the powerful. Instead, they should sharpen their self-understanding as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9-10), Then they should learn how to better reflect their faith, hope, and love to the nonChristians surrounding them in intelligent and positive ways. In short, the best response for Christians in a hostile, religiously pluralistic setting is to keep growing in Christ and to better prepare to serve both within the Church and within the broader society.
- B. Peter's message of hope to marginalized, persecuted minorities of the first century is a message of hope for today's marginalized, persecuted minorities. (Biak Uk Lian)
- C. Peter offered both a future and a present hope. The hope for the present was grounded in a proper understanding of their Christian identity (in continuity with ancient Israel) and grew out of their hope for the future (God will restore and deliver them).
- V. Theologizing (Contextualization of message)
  - A. Peter drew from the thought-world of ancient Judaism (covenant people, royal priesthood, chosen nation, etc.) and applied his inherited theological concepts to first century Christians, many of whom were Gentiles and many of whom were on the margins of Greco-Roman society. Peter created a picture of Christian identity that borrowed from the past and was, at the same time, contextually relevant to his readers.
  - B. How might interpreters of 1 Peter today utilize that same theologizing method to describe Christian identity and hope in their modern context(s)?

Ancient Israel>>>>	>1 Peter>	>>>>Today
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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> For more background and exegetical notes, see Appendix 9, "Persecution and Theological Perspectives in 1 Peter."

# 12.2 NT Apocalypse: The Revelation

- I. Context and Purpose of letter (Read Rev. 1:1-8; show photo of John on Patmos)
  - A. Key Purpose: to issue judgment and offer hope
    - 1. John condemns idolatrous state practices.
    - 2. John warns/encourages the Christians not to give in to pressure to compromise, even though they were experiencing or were about to experience persecution.
    - 3. John gives them hope that the future was firmly in God's hands: there was coming deliverance for them and judgment against blasphemers.
    - 4. John reassures them that Christ truly is coming back one day. (1:6-8)
  - B. In contrast to 1 Peter: The Revelation, like John's Gospel, responded to the persecution by especially focusing on the inevitability of persecution for the Christian. However, there was no instruction on how to avoid unnecessary persecution, nor was the emphasis on winning the lost. The thrust was instead mostly on encouraging faith and faithfulness.
  - C. Pastoral letter within Apocalyptic Genre

Revelation, in apocalyptic fashion, is focused on the course of history (i.e., a relatively short span of history: "the end") and on the forces of evil in conflict with God and the forces of good. Unmistakably, the concern was a pastoral one in which comfort was offered to its readers by indicating that the present evils and those to come were not outside of the control of God. The problems of the world came from a) God's acts of judgment on evil and idolatry or b) Satan and the fallen angels over whom God would ultimately triumph. While Peter employs the apocalyptic terms Babylon for Rome (5:13), Revelation goes into great detail painting a picture of evil at work. John describes principalities and powers in terms meant to draw the reader's attention to Rome and its emperor. The portrayal of the Beast uttering blasphemies and calling for worship probably refers to Domitian. (Cf. Fee, Beast from sea = "standard image for a world empire, not for an individual ruler," p. 236.)

Of greatest importance, <u>Revelation makes unmistakable the belief that the end of all the conflict would be characterized by the ultimate and eternal victory of God over Satan, the Beast and his other servants. Those who remain faithful, who do not worship the beast, will be among those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of Life and will participate in the great wedding feast. The letter explains persecution and offers comfort, hope, and encouragement to remain faithful amid it all.</u>

D. Thus, Revelation was written to encourage Christians to remain steadfast in faithfulness and hope: evil will be punished, faith will be rewarded; history is in God's hands; be sure you are on the right side!

#### II. Interpretation

A. How to interpret prophecies (e.g., Rev 2-3; 12:1-13:1)? General options:

- 1. Everything pertains to "back then" (preterist view; e.g. R.C. Sproul).
- 2. Revelation provides a map of Christian history or history of the Church.
- 3. Predictive prophecy only about end times (pre-millennial). (See Fee, *Reading the Bible for All Its Worth*, 243-45)
- 4. Everything is symbolic, basically depicting the cosmic struggle of Good versus Evil.

Key: Remember "intended" impact on readers then and now is of first importance.

- B. General comment on "prophecies" and symbols:
  - 1. Many scholars do not believe specific predictive prophecies were intended to be fulfilled literally (then or in some later time)—they are word pictures (symbols) of reality, not scripts. Others hold to the belief that the prophetic word for John's day was set against the backdrop of eschatological events. In this view, the set of predictions will be fulfilled in history. Thus, in the history of interpretation, Christian interpreters affirm that Revelation's prophecies will be fulfilled, but some say literally and others say figuratively.
  - 2. It is best not to try to "figure them out," because it is impossible to create a satisfactory timeline or sequence of events. It's better to see the prophecies as part of an apocalyptic genre, rather than foretelling specific events. Ask, what is the purpose behind these images? What is the intended rhetorical effect on the readers?
- C. Frank Matera: The theological significance of Revelation...is "its prophetic call to worship God and bear witness to Jesus" (p. 401).
- III. Timeless message behind the apocalyptic imagery for Christians.
  - 1. God has won the victory over evil through Jesus Christ.
  - 2. Judgment is coming for evil doers.
  - 3. Hope of new heaven and new earth—no more tears.
  - 4. Expect opposition, even persecution, for faith; hold firm to faith and witness.
  - 5. Salvation depends on faith and perseverance (with Hebrews; Calvin). All are judged by works but the saved are those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (20:11-15).
- IV. Theological contributions of Revelation (with 1-3 John)
  - 1. Love is the mark of God and of those who know God.
  - 2. God will not abandon those who are persecuted or who suffer unjustly. God is all powerful and faithful and just.
  - 3. Jesus Christ is Lamb of God.
  - 4. Final judgment for all, salvation for those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

# Theological Issue: Is God Just or Loving?

Just Love

Judgment Grace

Condemnation Forgiving

Punishment Merciful/Salvation

Hell Heaven

False dichotomy. God can be both loving and just.

Paul: God's justice is satisfied in Christ's death on our behalf. (Romans 3:25; 8:1-3)

John: Prospect of God's justice offers hope to the persecuted. Salvation is for those whose names are written in the book of life, though how one gets his/her name written in the book of life is not spelled out.<sup>35</sup>

In the old covenant, it seemed based on righteous deeds. The same idea is present in the NT, but if our righteousness is something God provides, rather than we earn (so Paul), then having one's name in the book of life depends on election by God and faith. Faith, then, is part of the gift. We look for signs of God's grace in the faith/belief within us, and by our perseverance in the midst of suffering and persecution.

Note: Human beings have a psychological need for justice. Yet, what we really mean is that we want others to be held accountable more than we want to be held accountable. If we truly want/demand justice, then everyone must be held accountable, including ourselves. In God's wisdom, the only way to meet the (real or psychological) need for justice and accountability is for each one to stand before the Judgment Seat of God. Since each one will be found to fall short of God's standards, then the only way to provide adequate consequences (punishment) and save us was to offer Christ as a sacrifice.\* To forgive without accountability minimizes the seriousness of our sin and frustrates human yearning for justice.

\*The concept of sacrificial atonement remains the predominant theological view expressed in both Old and New Testaments, even if there is debate as to what exactly this means. Perhaps the idea of Christ paying the "penalty" for our sins is only one possible interpretation for the meaning of Christ's death, one that is helpful for those who "need" such an interpretation to grasp the significance of their sin and the magnitude of God's sense of justice and love. We cannot say definitively, but can only do our best to discern the thinking of biblical writers and to reflect on the nature of God with the tools available to us. One suggestion: We might say that Christ had to die "because of our sins and to bring us to salvation" but stay open to there being multiple reasons for his death, some known and some unknown to us. (See lecture notes on "Soteriology" in Weeks 11-12 below for various views on the atonement.)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> See Ps 69:28; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19.

# 12.3 Small Group Discussion and Integration

- 1. What theological messages from the New Testament are most helpful to you as you struggle with rejection, judgment, marginalization, discrimination or outright persecution for your faith?
- 2. What is the best way for Christians to respond to hostility from nonChristians? When (or, under what circumstances) should you
  - a. Dialogue/compromise?
  - b. Silently stand firm/endure patiently?
  - c. Protest/even fight?
- 3. What questions do you have for the instructor?

# Week 13— New Testament Theology: Unity Amid Diversity 13.1

- I. The Task of Integrating New Testament Writings
  - A. Task: What provides unity amid diversity among the various writings?
    - 1. Is there one major integrating principle? (That is, is there one theme that ties together all the books of the New Testament? Answering this question is one of the tasks of doing NT Theology.)
    - 2. What are the common beliefs among NT writers? (Answering this question pertains to NT Theology, but more properly belongs to Systematic Theology.)

#### B. Proposed centers

- 1. There have been many different proposed "centers for the teaching of the New Testament...[including] kingdom, gospel, righteousness, justification, reconciliation, faith, new creation, salvation or salvation history, eschatology, Israel or the new Israel, the cross and/or the resurrection, the love of God, existential anthropology, and covenant."<sup>36</sup>
- 2. "Perhaps most common of all, Jesus (or Christology more generally) has been identified as the centre."<sup>37</sup>
- 3. In his recently published book, New Testament scholar Craig L. Blomberg (Professor, Denver Seminary) argues that the primary integrating principle for the various writings of New Testament is theme of "fulfillment" of Old Testament promises.<sup>38</sup>
- 4. The instructor does not try to identify one integrating principle, but instead focuses on a cluster of integrating concepts: God's word, covenant, salvation history and salvation itself.
- II. Integrating Theological Concepts (Old and New Testaments)
  - A. God's powerful Word (cf. Karl Barth 3 fold Word of God in creation/spoken; written; incarnate)
    - 1. Creation—God spoke the universe into existence.

James Dunn: God, as creator and sustainer of the universe, is foundational to all biblical theology.

- 2. Prophets spoke the Word of God (spoken and written)
  - a. Judgment
  - b. Promise
- 3. Jesus is the Incarnate Word, who also fulfills the promises of the Old Covenant
- 4. The written Word of God (variously understood, depending on one's view of inspiration. Two leading options: We view Scripture as divine words given by God, or mostly human words through which the Spirit of God speaks to us.)
- 5. Preachers are to speak as if they are speaking the very words of God (1 Peter 4:11).
- B. Covenant: Promise and Relationship
  - 1. Old Testament Covenants

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, "The Unity and Diversity of Scripture, in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T.D. Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), cited in his *A New Testament Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2018), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

Note: Ruler/Subject type of covenant: powerful party bestows favors with understanding of obedience to covenant regulations.

- a. Adam (Gen 3)
- b. Noah (Gen 6, 9)
- c. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Gen 12, 15, 17; Exod 2:24; see 1 Chron 16:15-17)
- d. Moses (Exod 19)
- e. David (2 Sam 23:5; 2 Chron 21:7)
- 2. New Covenant (New Testament)
  - a. Jeremiah (Jer 31:32ff.)
  - b. New Testament writers (e.g., Heb 7:22; 8; 1 Cor 11:25; Rom; Gal 4)

## C. Salvation History

- 1. The Bible is essentially the story of God's activity on behalf of humanity throughout history: Creation, Fall, Covenants, Israel, Royal line of David, Jesus, Church, Holy Spirit, Future expectation.
- 2. It is not a "recipe" book that provides detailed instruction on how to live in every situation. Rather, it is a testimony on how God acts throughout history to bring salvation to those who submit to God and put their faith in God's promises.
- 3. Modern scholars have questioned whether it is appropriate to view the Bible in terms of salvation history due to questions about accuracy of history and doubts about supernatural events described therein. E.g., Bultmann sought to "demythologize" the stories about Jesus, and interpreted the Bible in existential terms, i.e., the point of the stories and teachings is to drive people to surrender to God. However, a smaller number of scholars still maintain that the canonical text, taken as a whole, surely presents a history of humanity, from creation to the end of time, in a way that highlights God's love and saving actions on behalf of those who put their faith in him.<sup>39</sup>
- 4. James Dunn: The theology of salvation—God's deliverance of human beings from the threats and destructive forces of life is central to the biblical message.
- 5. Instructor: In both the OT and NT, salvation is consistently portrayed as something that comes from outside of ourselves. Someone else saves believers. They do not save themselves, nor are they capable of doing so if they tried. In the OT, God's salvation often referred to forgiving repentant covenant members of their sins and delivering them from enemies, such as Egypt and other oppressors. In the NT, God saves us from ourselves, including from the power and consequences of sin. Those who are saved under the NT are both forgiven and given new power to defeat the forces of evil in their lives. Theologically, the question is, how does God do this? How does God work in our lives to actually transform us and provide power to live more righteously, to love more purely and consistently, and to create communities of love, morality, and wholeness?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> For a thorough discussion of this subject, see Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Salvation Historical Fallacy? Reassessing the History of New Testament Theology*. History of Biblical Interpretation, edited by Robert Morgan. Leiden: Deo, 2004.

#### D. Salvation

- 1. Material (OT covenants: Israel's hope was in this life; NT covenant: Christians' material hope is in the next life, but is possible in this life for those who practice wise money management and good stewardship of material resources.)
- 2. Eternal/spiritual (OT Covenant: A few hints of eternal hope in the Psalms; NT covenant: Christians emphasize being born again in this life with benefits for both this life and the life to come.)
- 3. Individual salvation (Both Israelites and Christians have a means of forgiveness by God's mercy and grace and a pathway to sanctification. In the OT, individual salvation comes through belonging to the covenant community and by obeying the Law [OT]. In the NT, salvation comes through faith in Christ and sanctification through the working of the Holy Spirit.)
- 4. Corporate/Community salvation (In OT, Israel is saved as a chosen people, a covenant community. In the NT, the Church makes up the covenant community. The broader society benefits as followers of Christ faithfully act as salt and light in the world. Nature groans, awaiting God's redemption, when a new heaven and earth will be created.)
- 5. Societal component to biblical salvation? (Salt and light notion in the Synoptic Gospels suggests that Christians can make a positive difference in the broader society. However, the dominant view in the NT is that followers of Christ should expect persecution and marginalization. The Synoptic Gospels hold out hope of liberation for the poor and oppressed, but it is not clear what exactly this means or how such liberation will come about.)
- III. Synthesis of Unity in the New Testament<sup>40</sup>
  - A. New Testament theology assumed and drew heavily on Old Testament theological concepts.
    - 1. Dunn: NT writers "theologized" by reflecting on meaning and impact of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the context of ancient Judaism.
    - 2. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the new activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers in Christ were "game changers." In other words, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit's coming were the impetus for theologizing in fresh ways. Thus, as fulfillments of OT prophecies, they provide the foundation for the creation of a new religion built on the old.
  - B. A trinitarian understanding of God emerged in the first century and represents the best integration of the teaching of all the NT writers, when taken together as a group
    - 1. Jesus of Nazareth came to be understood as the promised Jewish Messiah (the Christ), who died for the sins of the world, was resurrected from the dead, and ascended into heaven. As such, he was eventually recognized as the Son of God,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> For a "Mini-Systematic Biblical Theology," see Appendix 10.

- Savior of the world, and Lord of the universe, to whom every living creature owes its allegiance.
- 2. God the Father, is the God who was known as Yahweh in the Old Testament, the Creator of the universe and all life, and the Father of Jesus Christ.
- 3. The Holy Spirit is God's power at work in the lives of believers in Christ to set them free from the power of sin, to enable them to fulfill God's will for their lives, and to ensure their hope for eternal life after death

#### **13.2**

- IV. Anthropology—Nature of human beings in relationship with God
  - A. Human Nature and Redemption
    - 1. Created good in the image of God (imago dei)
    - 2. Sin has marred the image of God in human beings to one extent or another. (Augustine's idea of Original Sin says that sin has contaminated the human race; those who don't believe in Original Sin still point to the pervasiveness of sin throughout human experience, even if we are not "born in sin".)
    - 3. Loved by God and Redeemed (In the Old Testament, God's love is expressed through the covenants with Abraham and his descendants. God provides redemption for his covenant people through a sacrificial system. In the New Testament, God is said to love the whole world and to offer new covenant available to Jews and Gentiles alike who submit to God and put their faith in Jesus Christ's sacrifice on their behalf. Believers are infused with the Holy Spirit.)
    - 4. Interpretive issue: How to properly balance the goodness of creation (including human beings) with human sinfulness (depravity). Roman Catholics have maintained a more optimistic appraisal of human potential, with God's help. Protestant Reformers (especially Luther and Calvin) have emphasized the depravity of human beings and their hopeless, inability to live righteously in their own power.
- B. Theological Issue: How are human beings both separate from God and yet connected to God? What is the best way to differentiate Creator from creation?
  - 1. Theologians discuss the transcendence of God versus the immanence of God (God is distinct from and far above human existence versus God's immediate presence in and among us). New Testament writers understand God as both transcendent and immanent. In Acts 17, for example, Paul explains to the philosophers of Athens that God wants people to seek him and reach out to him (thus affirming that God is distinct from his creation). At the same time, in the very next verse, he also affirms that human beings exist and live by the power and presence of God within them.

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And

he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all [people] life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' (Acts 17:24-28)

- 2. Historically, this question of the relationship between God and human beings has been answered variously under the categories of pantheism (everything is God), panentheism (God is in everything), and God is distinct from his creation (transcendent, yet immanent). Some theologies emphasize the near identification of God and human beings (i.e., they teach that your true identity is divine), while traditional theologies (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox) insist upon maintaining a clear distinction between Creator and creation (i.e., only God is divine, but we may participate in the divine nature of God through the power of the Holy Spirit).
- 3. If we group some of the most important biblical references by categories or types of actions, we can identify at least ten different ways the Spirit of God gives life to human beings. Together they represent a consistent New Testament perspective on how God works in human lives through the Holy Spirit. In bullet point fashion, we learn from Scripture that the Spirit . . .
  - 1) Gives life to every human being. (Gen 2:7; Ps 104:29–30; Acts 17:24-28)
  - 2) Convicts of sin. (John 16:7–11) The Spirit shows us our sin and convinces us it is wrong. To some extent, this may be the same as the human conscience, though psychologists teach us that many things may affect our sense of guilt and shame. Thus, we should not think that every guilty feeling we have comes from the Holy Spirit.
  - 3) Guides us to truth and specifically enables us to have faith in Jesus. (John 14:6; 16:13–15; Eph 2:8–9; 1 John 4:1–3)
  - 4) Makes us spiritually alive in a renewed relationship with God. (John 3:1–8, 16; 7:37–39; 20:19–23) That is, we are "born again."
  - 5) Inspires a living hope and real joy, coupled with a deep love for Jesus. (1 Pet 1:3–9)
  - 6) Gives power to resist sin and to live at peace. (Rom 8:1–6, 9; Gal 5:16)

- 7) Enables us to experience and exhibit "fruit" in our lives, which enable us to relate to others in more loving and godly ways. (Gal 5:22–23; 2 Pet 1:2–3)
- 8) Helps us to pray in ways we could not do on our own. (Rom 8:26–27; 1 Cor 14:2, 18; Eph 4:18)
- 9) Gifts and empowers us for Christian service to build up the body of Christ. (1 Cor 12; Rom 12:3–8; 15:18–19; Eph 4:11–16)
- 10) Empowers us to fight and overcome evil. (Eph 6:10–20, see especially vv. 17–18) While Jesus taught that we should ask God to "deliver us from evil," Paul taught that Christians may call upon the Lord to take a stand against evil forces that may come against us.
- 4. These many biblical references reveal the progressive nature of the Holy Spirit's activity in human beings, starting from simply being the divine breath within us to filling, empowering, and leading followers of Christ. Life in the Spirit begins with simply possessing God's life-giving breath, and thus applies to all human beings whether we recognize God's presence within us or not. However, the quality of how we experience the Spirit expands considerably when we enter a life-changing, personal relationship with Christ. In fact, the kind of experience with the Spirit that Luke, John, and Paul refer to is so qualitatively different from ordinary human life without Christ that we must consider this a kind of new life in the Spirit.

For the Christian, God's Spirit leads us to Jesus, gives us faith, and enables us to surrender our wills to God's will. Something happens inside of us that is like coming alive. We experience the forgiveness of sins. God takes away our guilt and shame. We become convinced that we truly belong to God and are members of the family of God. We come to love Jesus and want to follow him. We want to stop sinning, and we feel more strength and power to live for God, even if we still battle with stubborn sin throughout our spiritual journeys. All these experiences fit with what Jesus meant by being born again, or, being born of the Spirit (John 3:1–8). John explained that it is the Spirit of God that leads us to the truth about Jesus Christ, and that a true encounter with the love of God will transform us and enable us to become loving people in ways not possible beforehand (1 John 4).

As we mature in our relationship with Christ, we will experience more and more ways the Spirit breathes new life into our minds, relationships, and ways of being in the world. We will see God working through us to bless others and to enable us to contribute meaningfully in the church and in society. We will be better able to love God, ourselves, and others in lifegiving ways. For all these reasons, we can say we are living by the Spirit, because God's presence in us and the Spirit's working in and through us gives us a life that was and is not possible otherwise.

#### C. Human Response to God and God's Word—Options:

#### 1. Faith versus lack of faith

- a. Faith leads to receiving promises (though God's grace always precedes our response of faith and obedience)
- b. Lack of faith (doubt, disbelief) may lead to inaction or disobedience which results in failing to obtain the promised thing (e.g., land, city, healing, provision, protection)
- c. Analogy: Mother (God) prepares the meal for the family, but the children must eat it to benefit from it. Belief leads to action. Faith leads to obedience.

#### 2. Obedience versus disobedience

- a. Obedience and covenant faithfulness means blessing (Israel: material and covenant community blessings in this life; Church: spiritual blessings now, societal blessings, and new bodies in the next life)
- b. Disobedience means judgment (Israel: temporal/physical, possible destruction; Church: discipline, loss of reward, accountability on day of Judgment)

#### D. Contextual Issue: Buddhist anthropology vis-à-vis the Judeo-Christian tradition

- 1. Are human beings discrete creatures or are we all connected, and parts of one great Whole?
- 2. If we are part of a Whole, then salvation becomes a matter of creating better harmony among everyone rather than just individual salvation. Salvation frees us from our false, individualistic selves to discover our true selves in harmony with the Universe.
- 3. Critique: Like most dualistic thinking, to present the issue as an either-or (either we are discrete individuals or we are all connected, and part of the whole) tends to oversimplify the issue. Since, in practice, most of us experience both our individuality and mutual connectedness to others, a better approach to this anthropological question may come from a both/and perspective.

- a. To what extent is each of us unique and distinct from others?
- b. In what ways are we inextricably linked to one another, and to what extent is this connection?
- c. What are the implications of being an individual?
- d. What are the implications of being connected to others?
- V. The Relationship and Difference between the Old Testament and New
  - A. Similarities
    - 1. Covenants between God and human beings
    - 2. Covenants rooted in promise, grace and mercy
    - 3. Expectations extend to community life (social justice and compassion)
  - B. Differences
    - 1. Expanded role of the Holy Spirit in New Testament times (more of the same Spirit, now present in all believers' lives)

The Holy Spirit worked in the Old Testament times in ways consonant with NT concepts. The biggest difference is that in the OT the Spirit's work seemed to be select and occasional, whereas since Pentecost the Spirit fills all Christians and empowers all with gifts for service (at least theoretically!).

Retired pastor and author John Piper argues that OT saints were "born again" and were given a different "spirit" than others (e.g., Joshua, Caleb). 41 If he is correct, his view gives us a way to understand David's relationship with God and the Spirit. The reason David can write in ways that sound "Christian" is that his experience of the Spirit is similar. The indwelling and working of the Holy Spirit in individual lives is not restricted to prophets and special mighty acts, nor is it confined to Christians.

- 2. Different people involved (nation of Israel versus entire world who believes in Jesus)
  - Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17:1-8) When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> From sermon Piper posted on line (1984).

my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God." (Genesis 17:1-8, NIV)

- The whole world (John 3:16-17) Jesus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:16-17, NIV)
- 3. Different scope of benefits (material/communal/temporal versus spiritual/communal/eternal as well as in this life, with persecutions)

This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered. (2 Chronicles 31:20-21)

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." [= grace] Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first." (Mark 10:23-31, NIV)

4. Different conditions (both old and new covenants depend upon faith; but in the old there is more emphasis on obedience to Law and faithfulness to the covenant. In the new, the work of Christ on our behalf is emphasized, followed by a call to obedience to Christ, which is made possible by the Spirit)

- III. Intended Impact of New Testament on Readers (from canonical perspective)<sup>42</sup>
  - A. That readers would come to know, love, and serve God the Father, Yahweh, the God of Israel, who is revealed in Jesus Christ.
  - B. That readers would trust in Jesus as Savior and follow him as Lord. They would see God in Jesus; trust in his person and ministry for their salvation (forgiveness and reconciliation); follow Jesus' example for their values and purposes in life; and submit to his leadership, recognizing him as Lord of their life and their community (of fellow believers).
  - C. That readers would seek to live by the Holy Spirit—to be filled with the Spirit, to be led by the Spirit, and to be utilized by the Spirit to fulfill God's purposes.
  - D. Key passages to understand the purpose and intended impact of Scriptures on readers: Luke 24:45-49; John 20:31; 2 Timothy 3:15-16; Hebrews 4:12-13
  - E. Views of Select New Testament Theologians
    - 1. Rudolf Bultmann: Kerygma = a call to decision (addresses a person, makes a demand, calls for reaction). NT Theology is a process of religious-historical research into the kerygmatic character of the NT (Krentz)
    - 2. Karl Barth: Kerygma = word that confronts reader/hearer
    - 3. Peter Balla (per Frank Matera): NTT is "a descriptive, historical enterprise that deals with the canonical writings of the NT" and does NOT equate to a "normative discipline" (p. xxiii)
    - 4. A.K.M. Adam: post-modern NTT = "a theological interpretation that makes sense of the New Testament" (Matera, xxiii)
    - 5. Thomas Schreiner: NT seeks to magnify God in Jesus Christ, portraying a "now—not yet" experience of salvation.

#### 13.3 Small Group Discussion and Integration

Discussion questions

- 1. What holds the many stories, testimonies, and teaching of the New Testament together in theological harmony in your opinion?
- 2. What other reactions, thoughts, and questions are you having related to today's topic, "unity amid diversity in the New Testament"?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> See Appendix 11 for a collection NT verses that are particularly relevant for preaching the Gospel and moving a congregation toward faith and appropriate Christian behavior, which flows from a proper interpretation of NT theology.

## Week 14 Tensions and Challenges in Doing New Testament Theology

# 14.1 Tensions and Diversity in New Testament Theology

# I. Some Theological Tensions

# A. Soteriology

- 1. Relationship between grace and human effort in salvation—how much do our actions or behavior affect our relationship with God and eternal salvation?
- 2. Inclusive versus exclusive—Is Jesus' the Savior of the whole world, regardless of whether they know and believe in him, or only of his followers? Who will be saved? On what basis?

# B. Christology

- 1. Is Jesus just an extraordinary human being, or is he also divine?
- 2. Is Jesus primarily an ethical example for us to follow or is he the Son of God, Savior of the world, and risen Lord?
- 3. Is the importance of Jesus found primarily in his earthly life or in his role as risen Christ?

#### C. Eschatology

- 1. This world versus next-world—Is the Christian hope for this life, the next life, or both?
- 2. Realized eschatology versus "now and not yet"—Should we expect and look for Christ to return and save the world or should we focus on bringing the kingdom of God on earth through human effort (with or without God's help)?

#### D. Ethics

- 1. What rules from the OT Law belong to Christian practice today?
- 2. What practical teachings and instructions in the NT apply to today? Which don't?

# E. Examples of diverse emphases found among various NT writers

- 1. Matthew: Jesus intends for our righteousness to be lived out in action. Love of God and neighbor are the two most important commands of Scripture.
- 2. Mark: Jesus calls us to pick up our cross daily, and to sacrificially serve his purposes.
- 3. Luke: God stands on the side of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. The Holy Spirit is instrumental in our ability to fulfill our purpose in life. The Church is the New Israel, and God is faithful to his covenantal promises. (See Luke 24.)
- 4. John: Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life; he is God incarnate, the light of the world, the bread of life, and the good shepherd. Without him, we have no hope and are nothing. We must abide in him to experience eternal life, to be able to love others, and to bear fruit in our lives.
- 5. Paul: We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, created in him to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:8-10). Without love, I am nothing (1 Corinthians 13). The Holy Spirit is indispensable to experiencing real transformation in our lives and to

- fulfilling our purposes in life (Galatians 5:22-25; 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4; Romans 1:16).
- 6. Hebrews: Jesus is both our great high priest and the needed sacrifice for our sins. We are indebted to him for our salvation, can go to him with all of our concerns and needs, and must persevere in our faith in the face of temptation/persecution and hardship.
- 7. James: Faith without works is dead. True "religion" will show itself in very concrete ways, ranging from personal moral purity to merciful response to those in material need.
- 8. Peter: Christians are chosen by God to be a royal priesthood and holy nation. The church is the household of God, with a calling to holiness and witness in the world in the midst of persecution.
- 9. 1 John: Eternal life is about fellowship with God, which depends on an ongoing life of faith, forgiveness, and following Jesus. Love comes from God and love for God and our Christian brothers and sisters are central in practical Christian living.
- 10. Revelation: God triumphs over evil. Believers must remember whose side they're on, and in whom we are trusting for our eternal well-being. We must cling to faith, and not shrink back in fear or unfaithful behavior.
- F. Note: The responsibility of a NT theologian:
  - 1. Recognize and appreciate the diversity of the messages written in particular contexts for particular reasons.
  - 2. Reflect on how the Gospel and theological messages have been contextualized. Look for insights into the truths to which the contextualized messages point.
  - 3. Recognize/identify and appreciate the unity. There is one Gospel, but it has been and needs to be preached and applied in a wide variety of contexts.
  - 4. Be knowledgeable about the unity within the diversity found in Scripture. The responsibility of the Christian preacher is to present a coherent Gospel that others can understand, respond to, and live by.
  - 5. Develop hermeneutics (method of interpretation) to help the church today know how to apply ancient texts to modern contexts.

#### Additional challenging interpretative issues in the Bible.

#### Theological

- 1. Monotheism versus polytheism—The objections of Judaism and Islam, how can 1+1=1? (Knitter)
- 2. Divinity of Jesus—What does it mean for Jesus to be "divine"? How could God ever be a human being?

#### Science

1. Creation and human history—How are we to interpret the Bible's account of Creation and this history of the human race in light of modern science?

- 2. Heaven—What are we to make of the 1<sup>st</sup> century 3 tiered cosmology: underworld, earth, and heavens in light of modern science?
- 3. Virgin Birth—Literally true, myth, or legend? If not literally true, does that change our understanding of Jesus' divinity?
- 4. Miracles—Is the "supernatural" even possible? If so, how so? In what sense did Jesus perform "miracles"? Are miracles possible today?
- 5. Resurrection of Jesus—Literal, "real" but not literal, legend, myth to convey a truth, or symbolic? Should we look for a literal resurrection of ourselves after death or is our "new life" something to experience now?
- 6. Ascension of Jesus—Literal, myth, or legend?
- 7. Second coming of Jesus—To be interpreted literally or figuratively? If not a real return, then how does that change the Christian hope? What should we be doing now if Christ is not coming back again? What should we be doing now if he is coming back?

#### Social/Political

- 1. Patriarchy—Did God sanction male privilege/status/headship?
- 2. Role of women—How does God intend for women to be viewed? treated? What are appropriate roles for women in the family and church?
- 3. Attitude toward oppressive political powers versus liberation—Are Christians to submit to all authorities or only just ones? Are Christians to accept their conditions and focus on spirituality and the life to come, or are they allowed to/expected to work for societal and individual justice and transformation?
- 4. Kingdom/Imperial mentality—Is the royal language of the Bible an endorsement of imperial powers? Is "kingdom" language still relevant today?
- 5. Kingdom of God—Present or future? Is it something that God's does or humans bring about? Is it truly God's rule or human responsibility to liberate ourselves from poverty, injustice, etc.?
- 6. Violence versus pacifism—Does God truly favor certain nations and sanction their using violence to destroy their enemies? Was Jesus' blessing of peacemakers an endorsement of pacifism? Does the "Just War" theory square with Jesus' teaching on "turning the other cheek"?

#### **Ethical Issues**

- 1. Slavery and forced labor in OT—Was this sanctioned by God? If so, what is God's view of human rights? How can we draw on the Bible to inform our views on slavery and exploitation of other humans today?
- 2. Polygamy/concubinage (OT) versus monogamy (NT)—Did God change God's views on marriage? Does it matter to God how many wives a man has?
- 3. Homosexuality—Are the Bible's prohibitions and condemnation of homosexual practice relevant to same sex unions as envisaged today? If not, how is the modern debate different from the ancient one? If so, how can one justify homosexual practice and marriage/union?

The Interpreter's Responsibility The task of addressing all of these interpretive issues can feel overwhelming to theological students and pastors. Most pastors and leaders will have opinions, but have they done the intellectual and spiritual work necessary to be able to teach and preach

responsibly on these subjects? That is, each theological student and Christian leader has a responsibility to know what the issues are and to have an answer—even if it is a tentative answer—that offers a way of dealing with very real questions and issues that can deeply affect community life and the kingdom of God, as well as our witness to the non-Christian world.

## 14.3 Small Group Discussion and Integration

- 1. What stories, testimonies, or teachings are difficult make it difficult for you to hold a clear, consistent understanding of God and God's will for the human race?
- 2. When you speak to those from other religions, or no religion at all, what Gospel message could you confidently share with them?
- **3.** What issues and questions are you most struggling with related to living in a religiously pluralistic world?

## Week 15—Theologizing and Preaching the Gospel in Pluralistic Context

- I. What we can know about God and salvation (Epistemology)
  - A. Without revelation from God, theology is only guesswork. We are limited in what we can know about God, because God does not appear to us in physical form, except in the person of Jesus Christ. However, we can know about God through whatever God chooses to reveal to us through prophets, apostles (recorded in Scripture), and especially in Jesus (God in human flesh).
  - B. Still, even with God's revelation, there are limits to what we can know and understand about God. Paul taught that we "see through a glass darkly" (KJV) or "[see] but a poor reflection as in a mirror" (NIV, 1 Cor. 13:12). In ancient times, "mirrors" were metal and only reflected images vaguely. In other words, whatever we know about God through revelation can never fully encompass all of who God is and all of God's ways.
  - C. Furthermore, God's ways are not our ways (e.g., Isa 55:8), so we should expect to be surprised at times by how God works and chooses to reach out to human beings. For example, God does not treat us as we deserve, but out of his great mercy.
  - D. Summary: Our knowledge about God is limited and his ways are sometimes unusual and surprising to us, and difficult to comprehend. Simply put, God's ways are beyond human ability to fully grasp (e.g., Romans 11:33-36).
  - E. Application to us: Theologians need to remain humble. Theories about who God is and how God works should be made tentatively, not because Scripture isn't clear on most points, but because of our limitations in understanding and applying the teaching of Scripture. We may have confidence in what God has revealed in Christ and through Scripture; we may put our trust in the Gospel and in Christ for salvation; but we must acknowledge our own limitations in fully understanding either God or what God has revealed.
  - F. Implications for how you view your own faith and the faith and theology of others
    - 1. Seek to know God as best you can, relying on your understanding of Scripture and the guidance available from your faith community and spiritual leaders.
    - 2. If you have had a life-changing experience by putting your faith in Jesus Christ and following a Christian path, have confidence in the Gospel and in your own relationship with God.
    - 3. Accept that human limitations in understanding God, various cultural contexts, and diversity of experiences have produced different theological emphases among different branches and denominations of Christianity. This means that, on one hand, you may have confidence in your own Christian religious and spiritual tradition; and, on the other hand, you will try to understand why other Christian traditions may have different theological particulars and emphases. This openness to other viewpoints does not meant that you believe that all view are equally valid. Some viewpoints may be misguided or even harmful. Rather, humility and openness to other theological viewpoints means that you will treat those

who hold differing views with respect and will seek to understand why they hold the views that they do.

- G. Implications of our limitations for doing evangelism and inter-faith dialogue
  - 1. If your faith in Jesus and relationship with God is important to you and helpful in your life, have confidence to share the Gospel with others who do not know Jesus as you know him. Do not worry that you cannot understand all the ways of God or that other Christians or other religions teach different things. In evangelism, you can humbly share from your own knowledge of the Bible's teaching and your own experience with God, just as "one beggar shares with another beggar where he/she may find rice."
  - 2. When engaged in inter-faith dialogue, do so both as one who has something to share and as someone who has something to learn. Do not make assumptions about the validity of other religions (whether they are true or false), but rather assume that the God you know and believe in loves them as God loves you, and that God wants Jesus to be known and believed in by the whole world. Assume, too, that you can learn by listening to others about their beliefs and religious or spiritual experiences. It is not your job to convert them to Christianity, convince them of your views, or affirm that their views are equally valid to yours. Inter-faith dialogue seeks better mutual understanding, common ground, and ways to work together for the common good of society.

## Preaching the Gospel in a pluralistic world

I. Three basic positions on the relationship of Christianity to other "believers" (from other religions)

#### A. Exclusivism

- 1. Salvation is only through Christ, and is only for those who believe, repent. and follow Jesus. Condemnation for all others.
- 2. Biblical support is extensive: E.g., John 3:16, 21, 36; 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:9-15; Col. 1:19-23; 2:6-7; Hebrews 9:27-28.

#### B. Inclusivism

- 1. "Inclusivism teaches that Christianity is the only true religion (including the belief that Christ is the only Savior of men), but that this salvation could be made available through means other than explicit faith in Christ. The inclusivist believes that adherents of other religions and even atheists can be saved by responding to God's revelation in creation or through the elements of truth contained within their non-Christian religion."43
- 2. Compare: "Universalist" who go even further to say that all people will be saved, either because of God's love/mercy for the whole world or because God makes Christ's sacrifice efficacious for everyone, regardless of whether they believe in Christ.
- 3. Possible Biblical support: Phil. 2:9-11—the use of these verses for this view hinges on how to translate the subjunctive, everyone "should" or "will" bend their knee before the name of Jesus (NRSV, NIV, KJV versus

<sup>43</sup> http://www.gotquestions.org/inclusivism-exclusivism.html

NASB; "will" can be justified if Phil. 2:10 is alluding to Isa. 45:23); Rom. 14:11; 1 Tim. 4:10; Col. 1:20, but see vv. 21-23.

#### C. Pluralism

- 1. The Mystery of God is beyond human comprehension. Human religions are various attempts to express the truth revealed (observed) to various groups, like 5 blind men describing an elephant from different vantage points. Each one knows part of the truth; none has all the truth.
- 2. Possible Biblical support: Perhaps, Acts 17:21-31, but notice that God will judge by the man he has appointed, i.e., Christ; Romans 2:6-10. Cf. John 4, where Jesus says that salvation comes from the Jews, and that one day everyone will worship in spirit and in truth.
- 3. John Hick was leading proponent for pluralism. Paul Knitter offers a more Christian version of pluralism in that he prioritizes his own faith and experience with Christ, while promoting the contributions of Buddhist meditation (and aspects of Buddhist philosophy) to his spiritual life.<sup>44</sup>

# <u>15.2</u>

#### II. Further considerations:

- A. Why would anyone question the "exclusivist" position, since it is the dominant biblical perspective?
  - 1. There are biblical texts that sound inclusive. (See above.)
  - 2. We may meet "good" people from other religions, some of whom may seem more kind, good, or upright than Christians we know.
  - 3. Believers in other major religions (such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam) are often resistant to the Gospel.
  - 4. There are some modern philosophies and theologies that re-interpret a traditional Judeo-Christian view of God, which opens the door to a more inclusive soteriology (e.g., Process theology).
- B. John's context is particular (i.e., Christians and Jews in conflict). Does this limit the scope of application of Jesus' exclusive language? That is, the Jews knew Jesus but rejected him. So, when Jesus says, "No one comes to the Father except through me," and the Jews have "the devil for a father," is he just referring to those who have known Jesus but have rejected him?
- C. However, Paul's context was clearly pluralistic and not limited to one particular conflict. He insisted on the need to preach the Gospel to everyone, no matter what their family religion may have been. (Romans 1:16)

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> See John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995); and Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* (UK: Oneworld Publications, 2009).

III. Options for Evangelism: How the various theological positions (might) affect one's attitude toward evangelism

#### A. Exclusivists

1. Proclaim the Gospel as a call to repent and put one's faith in Jesus, or else... Heaven and eternal life is the reward for faith and obedience, and salvation is in Jesus and Jesus' shed blood on our behalf. Hell is the punishment for all those who rebel or do not believe in Christ. (E.g., see Rev. 7:9-17; John 6:51-58; Rev. 21:6-8)

#### B. Inclusivists

- 1. Proclaim the Gospel as good news for all people, that salvation is in Christ (for all people). It is possible that God will save those who do not know Christ. "We can leave those who do not hear the preached word to our good and capable God. He always does what is right." Thus, we may preach the Gospel as a message of salvation for those who put their faith in Jesus, and leave open the destinies of those who have never heard of Jesus, trusting in God to treat them fairly "according to the light they have been given." (See Romans 2:6-10.)
- 2. Universalist: All will be saved by the work of Christ on the cross, but your life will be better if you put your faith in Christ now before the end of time. (Popular hymn: "One day every knee will bow and tongue confess..., but the greatest joy is reserved for those who know him now." Philippians 2:9-11.)

#### C. Pluralists

- 1. Salvation is available to all who seek God, regardless of religion. We should assume all major religions are equally valid ways to Ultimate Truth. Possible analogy: In Asia, most people eat rice and fish. In Central America, rice and beans. In North America, meat and potatoes. Which is "right" diet? Do not all nourish?
- 2. Replace evangelism with interfaith dialogue. Study and discuss for mutual benefit, growth, and inspiration, but not to try to convert others.
- 3. Replace mission with service. Reach out to those of other faiths for the purpose of working together, caring for one another, meeting practical human needs, and promoting greater harmony and peace.

  Practical issue: How will you define "mission" today? If mission includes evangelism as well as service to humanity, it is genuinely holistic. If mission excludes evangelisms, it is only a social gospel.
- 4. Ultimately, one's faith is a matter of personal preference. What matters most is that one is seeking God/Ultimate Truth and is being transformed (ethically, relationally) by one's faith and relationship with God/Truth.

<sup>45</sup> https://wesleyanarminian.wordpress.com/2012/01/25/the-case-for-inclusivism/

- IV. Practical Suggestions: How to talk to other believers about one's Christian faith
  - A. Determine the starting place for the conversation. Where do you want to focus the conversation? On Heaven and Hell? On eternal life? On the kingdom of God? On one's relationship with God? Other?
  - B. What do you think is the heart of the Christian faith? Is it salvation from Hell? Heaven? A harmonious, healed relationship with God? Healing/wholeness for broken human beings? Making a better society and world? Other? Remember, the concept of eternal life is about a quality of life, not just quantity. Faith in Christ brings "life" to us now, in this world; and it extends through eternity for those who have faith and want it.
  - C. Listen for the "void" in the other person's life. Where do they need God? Speak to how Christ would make a difference in their life.
  - D. What about the Christian faith, and your experience with God, might be most life-giving to someone else?
  - E. Offer to share your own faith and experience with God (Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit)—why are you a Christian?
  - F. Indicate that you do not see it as your place to judge others. You have no power to send people to Heaven or Hell. God is the Judge of the world, and Scripture teaches that everyone must face final judgment. (Rom. 14:10-12; Heb 9:27; Acts 17:30-31)
  - G. Your faith is informed by Scripture and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Offer to walk someone through the story of Jesus and the chief elements of the Gospel. (E.g., Use the Roman road to salvation: Romans 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 10:9-10.)
  - H. As far as knowing what to think about followers of other religions, we may have to live with inner tension caused by conflicting thoughts and feelings within ourselves.
    - 1. On one hand, what we believe based on Scripture and our own view of Jesus may lead us to affirm that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life; and no one comes to the Father but through him (John 14:6).
    - 2. On the other hand, we must admit that most sincere religious people are alike, no matter what religion they subscribe to: they put their faith in a higher power, they want "God's" help, they want to live moral lives, and they want their children to be in harmony with God/Nature and their fellow human beings. 46 Thus, most humans are reaching out to God for help; and we can imagine (or our hearts tell us) that the Christian God (full of mercy, grace, love, and truth) will respond graciously to whatever sincere efforts anyone makes, and could even provide for their salvation based on his will and actions, not theirs.
    - 3. These realities will likely cause some tension within us as we approach evangelism and inter-faith dialogue. Let the tension produce humility within you, and a willingness to listen openly to the faith and experience of others.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Officially, Theravada Buddhism excludes any belief in God or dependence on God. Buddhists must rely on themselves to reach enlightenment. However, in practice, many Buddhists are also animists and appeal to spirits (Nats) for help. Some may even pray to Buddha, even though they are only supposed to look to him for inspiration.

However, do not let the tension undermine your confidence in your own faith in Jesus Christ and your readiness to share the hope that is within you that is available to all who put their faith in Jesus. (1 Peter 3:15)

#### 15.3 Class Discussion

- 1. How do your limitations in knowing God affect your theology and view of other religions?
- 2. Do you lean toward an exclusive, inclusive, or pluralistic theology?
- 3. What difference will your view influence your "preaching the Gospel in a pluralistic context"?

#### Week 16—Hermeneutics and Contextualization

#### 16.1 Hermeneutics

The Interpretive Task: Creating appropriate theological and ethical messages for today, using *bona fide* methods of interpretation (hermeneutics). That is, we need to bridge from the past to the present and determine what is "normative" for today.

The task is huge and complex, because many factors influence our ability to interpret the ancient text for the modern context.

- 1. Passage of time: Those who receive the Gospel and read the ancient texts today live two thousand years after Jesus and the original apostles.
- 2. Transmission has come through multiple contexts, cultures, and languages.
- 3. History of interpretation has contributed many new thoughts that influence how we read and understand ancient texts.
- 4. There's a challenge to determine appropriate methods of interpretation (hermeneutics) that all Christians can agree upon.
- 5. Ideological influences and pressing modern day concerns tend to influence our reading of the original text and theological analyses.

## Traditional View: Stendhal's three-fold task of biblical interpretation:

- 1. Describe what the text meant in its original context = Biblical Analysis and Criticism
- 2. Establish guidelines for interpreting ancient texts in modern contexts = Hermeneutics
- 3. Determine how to read, preach, and teach biblical texts within a specific modern context = Contextualization (I.e. "normative" applications of NT theologies for today)

Yet, hermeneutics should not be viewed as a separate task from the historical analysis of the New Testament. Why not? Because the NT writers themselves wrote their theologies as an interpretation of OT texts in light of the coming of Jesus and the Holy Spirit and in light of their particular contexts. In other words, as we discussed early on this course, the NT writers "theologized". They did not just repeat what they inherited from the OT, but selectively chose material from the OT and from their current experience with God to develop their theology and practices.

When we interpret the biblical text for today, we are (in a sense) doing what they did in their own times. We are continuing a process that exists within the NT itself, and not

starting something new. Thus, professor Dan Via has argued that hermeneutics belongs as part of doing NT Theology.<sup>47</sup>

So, how are we going to do this responsibly?

**On hermeneutics**. In this class, we cannot discuss hermeneutics thoroughly. Instead, we have focused primarily on the appropriate starting place for doing NT Theology: the biblical text itself. When it comes to attempting to bridge from the past to today, we need rules and guidelines. Today, we can just identify some key points for interpreting the Bible. Later you will take a whole course on this subject.<sup>48</sup>

For now, here are a few hermeneutical principles, in brief. Valid interpretations and applications of NT theologies will do the following:

First, decide how you are going to draw on the NT text for theological and ethical beliefs. Choose between one of the major paradigms for doing New Testament theology:

- 1. Create a systematic synthesis of all NT writers. (This has been the standard approach through the centuries and forms the backbone of what has traditionally been called "systematic theology.")
- 2. Compare and contrast individual authors. (This approach grew up in the era of biblical criticism. It has the advantage of identifying distinct contributions of various authors, diversity within the early Christian communities, and tensions in theologies that warrant discussion. However, it also can lead to a fragmented end result and confusion over how to apply the insights from this analysis for faith and practice today.)
- 3. Identify a canon-within-a-canon to stress which biblical passages are most important for theology and practical Christian living today. (This approach is consciously selective and requires making judgments on what is most important or valuable outside of listening to the full witness of Scripture. However, it is also practical, because it sharpens the message of Scripture and reduces tensions among competing ideas by prioritizing some over others. E.g., Martin Luther prioritized Paul over James, grace and faith over works.)
- 4. Adopt an ideological approach by stressing a particular biblical theme as most important. (This approach is selective and intentionally biased, but is helpful for bringing out particular issues, such as socio-economic concerns, role of women, post-colonial issues, etc.)
- 5. Begin with the NT messages that resonate with your own context today. (This approach emphasizes the ability of Scripture to speak to every generation and in every context, and consciously listens for what the Spirit is saying in various settings today through the biblical text. However, it relies heavily on subjective readings and may lack the discipline to take seriously biblical

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Dan O Via, What Is New Testament Theology? (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 2002), 59.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> For a good, readable resource on interpreting the NT, I recommend *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, by Gordon Fee. See, also, the outline of hermeneutical options from Sayama Eh Tar Gay's Hermeneutics class.

subjects that don't immediately resonate, but which still have tremendous theological value.)

# **Instructor's Approach as One Example**

Paul provides the most comprehensive teaching and interpretation of the meaning of the crucified and resurrected Jesus for one's relationship with God. He is also the NT writer who most explains the nature of God's grace and the basis of faith in Christ for salvation. For this reason, Protestant Reformers and Baptists since Martin Luther in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century have focused on Paul as the lead NT theologian.

At the same time, each biblical writer contributes to our full understanding of the meaning of Jesus Christ and the Christian life. Instead of trying to fit all NT writings into Paul's theological "mold", we can listen for each writer's unique voice and contribution. Where there is tension between theological views or practical teaching, we should remember that there is a greater truth than either one could fully express within his own unique context. We may not ever be able to identify or articulate that greater truth, but we must humbly accept the limits of our abilities to formulate a comprehensive and completely consistent New Testament theology, but we must keep trying.

Philosophically, I approach spirituality first from a Christian existential point of view. This means that I look to the texts as catalysts (or tools of the Holy Spirit) to transform my personal relationship with God. At the same time, the historical context for each writing remains important as grounding for the ideas and views expressed. I also look to Scripture to inform my understanding of Christian community and the meaning/purpose of my life individually, in relationship to others, and as part of the church of Jesus Christ.

My core theological message is grounded in my interpretation of Paul's teaching that God is a God of love and justice, Jesus Christ is the Savior and Lord of the world, and the Holy Spirit leads and transforms the lives of believers according to God's purposes. At the core of God's relationship with believers and God's calling on our lives is love and grace, which draws believers into eternal life and empowers us to fulfill God's purposes for our lives.

- A. The Gospel announces salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and transforms our relationship to God, to ourselves and others by the power of the Holy Spirit. (See the detailed overview of Paul's theology in an earlier lecture.)
- B. Human response to the love and grace of God
  - 1. **Our responsibility** is to put our faith in Christ, humble ourselves before God, listen to the Spirit, and respond in every way that seems appropriate to the leading of the Spirit. At core, the primary appropriate responses to God are belief, gratitude, praise, submission, obedience, and cooperation so that we may live in a right relationship with God and keep growing as Christ-centered, Spirit-led believers.
  - 2. As individuals and as communities of faith, we are transformed over time by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us the ability to believe in God's promises. The Spirit enables us to receive God's love, to love ourselves and to love others. The Spirit leads us to

- real repentance, where we turn away from sin and increasingly embrace the life God intends for us. The Spirit gives us an ability to exhibit divine qualities and leads us to fulfill our God-given purpose in life. The Spirit is Christ's voice guiding, leading, correcting, rebuking, speaking to us through Scripture and others, and encouraging us from day to day.
- 3. The Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit create the body of Christ. Together, we form the kingdom of God where Christ rules and in which we do the works of Christ both for the sake of the Church and for the sake of the broader society.

In seeking to do justice to the complementary, core messages of various NT writers, I try to incorporate each one into my preaching and teaching on God's grace, faith in and allegiance to Jesus Christ, and Spirit-filled and Spirit-led living. (E.g., Matthew 25 emphasizes good works and just living as the basis for final judgment, and the story of the rich man in Mark 10 suggests that followers of Jesus must give up all their possessions. I read these stories through the lens of God's grace as the basis for salvation and works as a mark of genuine conversion, but not a measuring stick to qualify or disqualify someone from forgiveness and salvation.)

# Bridging from then to now:

When formulating theologies for today, a responsible hermeneutic will do the following:

- 1. Consider the genre (e.g., Gospel, History, Epistle, Apocalyptic) and intended messages of the author for his original audience.
- 2. Know yourself! Know your community/context!
  How is your own experience, preferences, needs, and concerns influencing what you believe and what you want to communicate to others?
- 3. Take theological positions that can be well supported by biblical writings and that genuinely flow from one or more NT theologies, and not just one or two verses or passages. Have you genuinely respected the biblical writers and teachings found in the Bible? How do your views fit with other interpretations in the Church over the centuries?
- 4. When your views differ from the views expressed in a NT text, be able to explain or justify why you think differently. Is there something from modern science, the history of interpretation, the modern world, etc. that calls for deviating from a biblical teaching or ethic (e.g., on slavery, polygamy, patriarchy, etc.)?

# **16.2 Contextual Theology**

I. How doing Contextual Theology relates to NT Theology and Hermeneutics?

NT Theology focuses on the teachings found in the New Testament and seeks to understand them in their original context. Hermeneutics, most broadly, refers to all the rules and guidelines for making appropriate interpretation of biblical texts for today. Contextual theology, more narrowly, seeks to understand how God is at work in any particular context and how the Gospel (and Biblical teachings) can be best communicated within various contexts. In other words, both hermeneutics (methods of interpretation) and contextual theology explore how ancient writings have been, can be, and ought to be applied to modern contexts, such as a particular race, tribe, nationality, or any other sub-group within a culture.

Doing (Christian) contextual theology travels in at least two directions.

- 1. It puts the Gospel handed down from the apostles in the first century and through the missionaries in terms that would be appropriate (understandable) to another context.
- 2. It also goes the other way, when it examines a particular cultural context for signs of God's activity prior to the coming of the Gospel, and then compares and contrasts what was in the particular context to what is found in the Bible and in the mouths of the missionaries/preachers.

Thus, contextual theology is dialogical. It identifies spiritual truths and realities found in a particular modern or ethnic context and then enters into dialogue with theological beliefs and concepts found in other cultural expressions of the Christian faith (including the Bible), and even of other religions.

E.g., Lai Chin worshipped a god by the name of Khuazing (supreme being). Some believe this is the same as the Christian God.

E.g., The Supreme Being in pre-Christian Karen religion was said to tell of a lost book that would be brought to the Karen people by a foreigner bearing a new book.

E.g., The Apostle Paul preached the Gospel to Jews in Rome and elsewhere by drawing connections from their Scriptures (the Old Testament) to Jesus. "From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets" (Acts 28:23).

E.g. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews preached the Gospel to his Jewish readers by comparing and contrasting Jesus to Moses and the Jewish High Priest. (Hebrews 3-6)

- II. Important question for modern day theologians and pastors<sup>49</sup>
  - A. How should theologians in the East view the teachings of the New Testament through the lens of the religious and philosophical thought of their own cultural context? Should they assume that God has already revealed God-self in their culture, but perhaps in different forms and language than what is found in the New Testament and traditional Western theological formulations? If so, how should they proceed to find God's revealed word or self in their own culture? When does the teaching of the New Testament speak a new word into their cultural milieu? How would they know if a teaching of the New Testament is to replace a common belief or practice in their own culture?

Apart from the challenging intellectual (theological) questions of contextualization, there are also practical questions of how to know what to preach and teach. How do pastors preach and teach from the Bible written thousands of years ago in the Middle East and Western Europe within the context of their local church?

Fact: The core theological truths in Scripture are understood and valued in every culture where the Gospel has been preached and accepted.

Nevertheless: Even if one assumes that the message(s) of the New Testament does not need to be significantly modified or altered in order to preach the Gospel in the East, there are still issues of interpretation. Cultural and subcultural issues affect how congregations hear Scripture, how Scripture needs to be taught and preached, and what needs to be emphasized.

- B. Contextual theologies: The many faces of Jesus Christ<sup>50</sup>
  - 1. Feminist theology
  - 2. Black theology
  - 3. Womanist theology (black women)
  - 4. Liberation theology of Latin America
  - 5. Korean Minjung theology
  - 6. Indian Dalit theology
  - 7. Japanese Burakumin theology

III. Contextualization of one's message can go beyond actually doing theology to consider how a certain Christian sub-group will hear our proclamation of the Gospel, preaching and teaching. In other words, different ethnic groups and members of different

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> See Simon Chan, *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith From the Ground Up* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic 2014) for a valuable overview of leading Asian theologians and a discussion of contextual theologizing in Christian Asian experience.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> See Volker Küster, *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ: Intercultural Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999); and *Jesus through Asian Eyes: Frequently Asked Questions About Jesus, Life and Faith in God* (Czech Republic: The Good Book Company Ltd, 2014).

denominations even within the same ethnic, racial, or national groups, develop their own "ear" to certain ideas and teachings based on their context. The more we are sensitive to a particular context (their issues, fears, history, concerns, priorities, needs, etc.), the more we can take care to maximize our true intentions and minimize misunderstandings.<sup>51</sup>

Practical: When it comes to putting your conclusions into words for preaching, teaching, and writing in your context, ask yourself the following:

- 1. What are the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and practical needs of your intended audience?
- 2. How will the intended audience hear and apply the messages?
- 3. Does the message I am communicating from the NT fairly correspond to the original intention of the author for his context? That is, am I changing the meaning or simply expressing it in new words with new illustrations and applications? If not, can I justify the changes I'm making? Am I being honest about the changes I'm making?

# 16.3 Small Group Discussion and Integration

- 1. In your opinion, how important is the original meaning of the NT texts when you interpret NT theology for your context today?
- 2. How do you plan to preach and teach from the New Testament in your context in light of hermeneutical challenges and contextual issues?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> See Appendix 12 for "Examples of How Christian Sub-Cultures Vary from One Another."

# **Appendices**

# **Foundational Issues in Doing New Testament Theology**

- I. Interconnecting Issues (Cf. Dunn's list of issues)
  - A. The General Task—What is the real task of NT Theology?
    - 1. Are we studying the history of Early Christianity?
    - 2. Are we learning the various teachings of the New Testament?
    - 3. Are we simply observing what is said and what happened (viewing the texts as "descriptive")? Are we reading to know what to believe and to do for ourselves (viewing the texts as "Prescriptive")? Both?
  - B. The Sources—Which sources are appropriate for doing NT Theology?
    - 1. Canonical NT only? (Would you limit your study to the 27 canonical texts?)
    - 2. All extant "Christian" religious documents? (In addition to the canonical New Testament, would you include Gospel of Thomas? Would you include Gnostic, apocryphal Gospels and other writings? Apostolic Fathers?)
  - C. Starting Place—Where should we begin our study?
    - 1. Old Testament/Judaism? (Is a proper starting place for doing NT Theology a study of ancient Judaism?)
    - 2. Jesus? (Should Jesus' teaching be the starting place?)
    - 3. Easter *kerygma*? (Is it better to start with the post-resurrection proclamation of the Gospel?)?
  - D. Organization
    - 1. By Theological Concepts?
    - 2. By Key NT theologians/writers?
    - 3. By Periods of Development?

# II. The multi-fold task of New Testament Theology

# A. Krister Stendahl's model—Division of Primary Tasks

- 1. Describe what the text meant in its original context = Biblical Analysis and Criticism
- 2. Establish guidelines for interpreting ancient texts in modern contexts = Hermeneutics
- 3. Determine how to read, preach, and teach biblical texts within a specific modern context = Contextualization (I.e. "normative" applications of NT theologies for today)
- **B.** James M. Robinson twofold task of NT Theology
  - 1. "Give a historical analysis of the texts of primitive Christianity"
  - 2. "To hear these texts in such a way as to express their valid content so that it can emerge as a serious alternative for modern times (the hermeneutical-normative task)."52

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> As cited by Dan Via, *What Is New Testament Theology?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 2002), 71.

- C. James Dunn's approach to Task 1 (analysis of historical texts)
  - 1. Study writers
  - 2. Study themes
  - 3. Study movement from 2d Temple Judaism as seen in various NT writers
- **D.** For the instructor, doing NT theology involves understanding the thinking and teaching of the NT writers in their original context and in light of how their thinking "theologizes" the faith they inherited from Judaism. We need to identify the diversity exhibited in the NT and the unity that emerges from both a study of the texts and a personal reflection on the theological message(s) based on our own experience. Doing NT theology then is a combination of analyzing the NT texts themselves, reflecting on the soil from which they came, and making explicit the lines of connection between the ancient NT text and our own faith today. The latter (task 2 or 3, depending on which model you are using) is what is the most challenging for interpreters today.
- E. On the other hand, there are those who argue that we cannot do NT Theology by separating the tasks into "then" and "now." Such scholars argue that NT Theology is essentially about the present time. It involves interacting with the ancient texts, and even depends on them, but is something that ultimately pertains to today. Thus, hermeneutics cannot be separated from doing NT Theology, in their opinion.
- **F.** Where does that leave us?
  - 1. The tremendous difference of culture between "then" and "now" demands at least an attempt to isolate the NT in its own cultural milieu. But how far will this go and what will it look like? Is this to be a history of Christianity or a study of the teaching of the NT in its historical context? Part of the answer is dictated by the sources.
  - 2. The instructor agrees that doing NT Theology is incomplete with a discussion of hermeneutics and how NT texts are read, understood, and interpreted today. Yet, the tasks can still be isolated into distinct steps—or at least we need to try to do so, so as to not rush past the historical task, which yields information about the first century and helps us identify important theological questions and contextual issues that may help us in

wrestling with the same topics and issues today.

# III. Sources for doing New Testament Theology

### A. The limitations of available sources.

Since we are seeking an historical analysis, in some form, all material that might shed light on the thought world of early Christianity is relevant. However, any attempt to recreate "Early Christianity" quickly must face the reality of lack of information and indications of great diversity among adherents. Mostly, we have available the point of view of the "winners," and our understanding of "the losers" is due primarily to information from their opponents.

Further, knowledge of 2d Century Ebionites, Gnostics, Montanists, et al. whether firsthand or from their opponents, gives us no certain knowledge of what was happening in the first century. Outside of the canonical texts, we have almost no material. (The Gospel of Thomas is one notable exception.) See Helmut Koester's attempt to reconstruct early Christianity with non-canonical sources. Where does this leave us?

#### B. The Hermeneutical Circle

However, the moment one begins such a process, it becomes evident that one's own faith perspective greatly influences one's selection, interpretation, organization etc. of the material.

If one attempts to blend the two major aspects (leaving aside the middle step of the probably impossible task of arriving at universally agreed upon methods of bridging the gap from the Bible to today), we find ourselves back to the history of interpretation that has repeatedly followed the **hermeneutical circle.** This circle begins with the presuppositions (what they believe before they begin their study of the Bible) of the interpreters, which influence their research and analyses of the data (the biblical text). The "results" they find reinforce their presuppositions. They believe that their conclusions come only from the text, when in fact they have been influenced by what they believed before they began. In other words, the hermeneutical circle winds up "proving" what was "assumed" at the beginning, which is no proof at all!<sup>53</sup> However, approaching a subject without presuppositions is impossible. One cannot explore a topic without starting with tentative assumptions about what's important, what data is relevant, and how new material might fit into existing ideas. What's important is to be aware of one's assumptions, so that one will not naively travel the hermeneutical circle thinking he or she is doing research in a vacuum. In addition, proper scholarship (as well as Christian

<sup>53</sup> This is not how Wikipedia or Stanford defines the circle, but it does seem to fit with common usage among NT theologians. There are multiple definitions, one of which relates to how the whole concept can be understood/discussed from its parts, when then leads to postulating what the whole is. Whole>>Parts>>Whole>>Parts...

spirituality) requires remaining open to be changed by what one finds in the process of research and analysis, listening and receiving.

There are key problems on both ends of the process. On one end (historical analysis), our sources are limited and the various pieces of literature represent different genres, directed to different situations for different purposes, which yield different types of information—too little and too diversified to draw conclusive generalizations in terms of a whole system of theology. On the other end (application to today), in view of the diversity of theological positions, the multiplicity of modern contexts, and our own subjective biases and conditioning, determining what was and is to be considered "normative" ultimately becomes an arbitrary decision.

N.T. Wright describes the hermeneutical process in terms of "critical realism." According to Dan O. Via's summary of Wright's position, "For Wright New Testament theology is clearly both historical and hermeneutical, theologically relevant for today... Critical realism acknowledges that we can know reality outside of ourselves, but this knowledge about the other is always grasped by means of—seen through the lens of—our own story or worldview. Thus knowledge is always marked by the knower's subjective vantage point and is therefore provisional. Acquiring knowledge is a continuing dialogue between knower and the known…"<sup>54</sup>

Practically, then, we have no choice but to continue to attempt to separate the historical, analytical work from the modern day application, while at the same incorporating our own subjective perspective into our analysis of ancient texts. We must recognize the limitations of the sources and of our own ability to be objective, and that one person's work can never serve as "the standard" but must always be read in conjunction with other approaches and points of view. We must accept that we can try to be as objective as possible in our historical analysis of the text and the ancient cultural context; but that we cannot help but be influenced in conscious and subconscious ways by our own culture and context. Even more, we must recognize that when Christians do NT Theology today, how one reads and understands the teaching for today in our own contexts is always relevant.

# C. A reasonable approach

By necessity, (and personal theological preference), the instructor advocates examining the canonical NT as primary texts, allowing for comparisons to be made to non-canonical first century works as available. NT documents deemed to be from the early 2d century (e.g., 2 Peter) might reasonably be contrasted with Didache, Shepherd of Hermas or other works, though we don't have time for such comparisons in this course.

While attempting to be as objective as possible, it would be impossible to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Dan O. Via, What is New Testament Theology, 79.

approach the task without recognizing and admitting one's own assumptions, biases, faith and Christian experience. The instructor regards the canonical NT as that body of literature through which the Spirit of God awakens faith and gives direction to believers. He assumes God was actively involved in the creation of these texts and continues to work in the reading and preaching of them—especially as they point to the nature of God and to God's work throughout history to bring salvation to the world. The value the church (especially prior to the Enlightenment) has placed on these particular documents is further justification for giving priority to canonical texts.

# IV. Historical Representative Positions

Those who have undertaken the task of writing a New Testament Theology (NTT) over the past few hundred years cannot easily be classified because they take various positions on the issues outlined above. Many are committed to separating the historical task from the theological one (e.g., Gabler, Strauss, Wrede, J. Weiss, Stendahl, Braun, Räisänen), while others either consider this impossible, undesirable or both (e.g., Schlatter, Barth, Bultmann, Käsemann, Kümmel). Some, in fact, insist that NT theologians must bring historical-critical principles into "critical dialogue" with the claim of the NT to revelation (Goppelt), or that NTT should be set free from the historical discipline (e.g., Morgan). Yet of those who insist on separating the tasks, some pursue the historical task vigorously (e.g., R. C. Baur) while others the theological (e.g., Strauss, Barth). Some pursue the historical task in order to validate their theological convictions (e.g., Richardson), while others examine the theological statements in order to make an historical statement (e.g., Dunn).

Both critics and supporters acknowledge, however, that almost all NTT to date has been influenced by dogmatics, regardless of theological point of view and hermeneutics. A survey quickly reveals among "investigators" a whole range of personal convictions and theologies from liberal ethicists (e.g., Holtzmann), to so-called existentialists who either "demythologize" the NT (e.g., Bultmann, Conzelmann) or use it almost indiscriminately (e.g. Barth), to conservative harmonizers (e.g., Richardson), to humanists (e.g., Braun), and those who want to move beyond any normative interpretation of the Bible (e.g., Räisänen).

Then there the ideological theologies: liberation theology, feminist theology, African theology, Asian theology, Emergent theology, and so forth.

Upshot: The task of NTT is itself defined variously and the issues are complex. There is not one right answer. So, we need to pick a course of study, knowing that there are other valid approaches as well.

On differences in disciplines: How is doing New Testament Theology different from doing systematic theology and modern theology? (New Testament Theology is rooted in the views of the biblical authors, who wrote within their own contexts. Systematic theology has classically focused on primary theological topics, as discussed by various biblical writers. Modern theology often begins with philosophy or theological paradigms and discusses theological themes in light of biblical teaching and modern thought and issues.)

# **Purposes of Paul's Letters**

Literary and Rhetorical Purpose of Letters in the Bible

- 1. General comment: To understand and interpret NT epistles, students should raise the question of "purpose" when reading each letter.
  - a. We call the purpose of a letter or Gospel, the "authorial intention"—whether explicitly stated, deduced from the content or structure of the argument, or suggested by the problems addressed and what can be known about the context.
  - b. However we must acknowledge our limitations in identifying authorial intention.
  - c. Postmodern critique: The meaning of a text or letter is in its subjective interpretation by the reader. "Deconstructionism" expects each reader will find his/her own meaning. The assumption is that the original intention is either not discernible or irrelevant.
  - d. Implications: Doing NT Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will have to take into account both the text and the reader, both the original context and the modern context, both the history of interpretation and modern interpretive issues, both objective and subjective factors. Such complexity in doing theology should produce a certain humility on the part of the modern theologian, as well as a caution against simplistic or dogmatic theological conclusions, be they fundamentalist, denominationalist, or overly context-specific (e.g., from one ethnic group, nationality, race, gender, socio-economic situation, etc.).

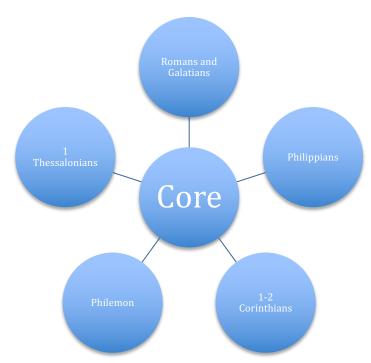
# General purposes of Paul's writings

- 1. Pastoral letters of encouragement to specific churches Paul founded (1-2 Cor., Gal, Phil, 1-2 Thess)
- 2. Doctrinal synthesis with particular audience in mind (Romans)
- 3. Letters to individuals to address matters that pertain to them as individuals and/or to the churches they are serving as pastors (Philemon, Pastoral epistles)
- 4. General letters may be summaries of Paul's teaching and/or circular letters that go to multiple churches (Ephesians, Colossians)

One Theory to explain differences among Paul's epistles: Principle of Core and Contingency (first introduced by Dr. Christian Beker, formerly of Princeton Theological Seminary)

1. Principle explained: Paul had core beliefs, but he presented and explained them in different ways depending on contingent situation; similarly, he drew different practical implications of his core beliefs depending on his audience (context). (Beker)

- 2. Paul practiced "theologizing," i.e., he developed his theological beliefs by thinking aloud and by grappling with questions and issues as they arose over time. (See Cal Roetzl, James Dunn, et al.)
- 3. Core and Contingency in Paul.



- a. Paul had a basic **Gospel message** he believed, along with certain religious/ethical teachings; his letters reflect his addressing of specific "contingent" situations and issues from the "core" of his beliefs. Similarly, from Dunn's perspective, we could view the differences among Paul's writings as examples of "theologizing"—seeking to draw out implications and new insights of the Gospel in light of different contingencies.
- b. Thus each letter and each teaching must be read in light of the particular concerns involved/addressed, and each statement must <u>not</u> be read as propositional doctrine, universally and eternally true. Each teaching has a particular context, which may have led to different expressions of the faith because of different needs and circumstances in various churches.

# Possible Examples:

1) Jewish versus Hellenistic ways of presenting Gospel—in different epistles, Paul emphasizes different theological concepts to describe the Gospel. For example, in some letters, he speaks of justification (Romans, Galatians); citizens of heaven (Philippians); reconciliation (2 Corinthians); and/or power of Spirit to transform believers (1 Thessalonians, Romans, Galatians).

- 2) Particular practical issues are emphasized or even handled differently depending on the audience or situation being addressed. For example, role of women in the home and church. Paul's statements range from maintaining there is no distinction between men and women in Christ (Galatians 3) to insisting women should remain silent in church, be subordinate to their husbands, and even wear head coverings (1 Corinthians, Ephesians, pastorals). Another example: how Paul handles the law. He can simultaneously speak of the inadequacy of the law for salvation and of its goodness (Romans); he can also sound very anti-Jewish law (Galatians), but when speaking about the obligation of Christians to obey the emperor, he will uphold the law of the land (Romans 13).
- c. Alongside of applying his core theology differently in various contingent situations (different communities), some difference may be due to the development of his thinking over time. In James Dunn's language, Paul was "theologizing" over time. That is, he was developing his thinking in light of specific issues and was not necessarily presenting a comprehensive (entirely consistent) theology. Romans was probable his most extensive attempt to do so, but even the church in Rome had a particular context that influenced his teaching (i.e., a need to address false pride in human potential to please God by one's own efforts).
- 6. Key Issue: Can we truly ascertain the "core" of Paul's message and separate it from the contingencies?

# Paul's Use of Scripture

The Apostle Paul primarily used the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, known as the Septuagint, symbolized by Roman letters, LXX. However, many of the quotes are either paraphrases or combinations of verses, which he may have been quoting from memory from anthologies (a published collection of verses, compiled by someone else) or somewhere else. For a detailed academic discussion of this subject, see Stanley E. Porter's seminar paper presented to the Paul and Scripture Group at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting (2006).<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> http://www.westmont.edu/~fisk/paulandscripture/Porter.html, accessed 7.20.2017

# Paul's understanding of grace in Romans 6

What It Really Means to Be "Under" Grace (6:16-23)

One of Paul's goals was to contrast life under the Law with life under Grace. There is scholarly debate as to Paul's true view of the Law. There is also debate regarding his true views of ancient Israel and Judaism.

- Was he against the Jewish Law or against a misinterpretation of it?
- Did he believe that Judaism was basically a works-righteousness religion (traditional interpretation) or was he only talking to Judaizers (those who wanted to add the Law to the Gospel)? The "New Perspective on Paul" argues that Paul was only talking to those who distorted Judaism.

# Paul's Context and Dualistic Language

The instructor's view is that Paul is addressing a misunderstanding of the purpose of the Law, and he was not writing about Judaism in general. He was writing to counter those who thought salvation came from observing the Law. Thus, he used extreme, dualistic language at times to argue for the superiority of relying on grace and trusting in God in Christ to relying on one's own ability to keep the Law.

For example, in chapter five, Paul says that the Law actually increased sins (Rom 5:20), and thus is almost a co-conspirator with Sin in enslaving human beings to Sin. However, Paul will defend the Law in Rom 7; Gal 3:21.

In chapter six, he portrays grace as the polar opposite to the Law, just as the fruit of grace are polar opposites to the fruit of the Law and Sin. Identifying Paul's context (to whom he is speaking, what misinterpretation of the Gospel he is addressing, what problem is besetting the church, etc.) is very important for properly interpreting his writings.

VS.

Life under Law and Sin

Slaves to  $\underline{\sin}$  (6:16)

Life under Grace

Obedient from the <u>heart</u> to teaching

(6:17)

Freed from sin>>slaves of <u>righteousness</u>

(6:18)

"human terms" (6:19) = Paul is using an imperfect analogy, since referring to life in Christ as slavery clashes with the

concept of freedom in Christ.

Present members of body as slaves to impurity and vs. Lawlessness, resulting in

<u>Lawlessness</u> (6:19);

Present members of body as slaves to

righteousness, resulting in sanctification/holiness (6:19)

<u>Free</u> from the control of righteousness (6:20)

Outcome is shame and death vs.

(6:21)

Outcome is <u>eternal life</u> (6:22)

Slaves to sin (6:16, 20)

VS.

Freed from sin and enslaved to God

(6:22)

Wages of sin is death (6:23) vs.

Gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus

our Lord (6:23).

# Interpretation—Select Issues

• To what extent are we "slaves" to righteousness, if we are told to present our bodies in slavery to righteousness? Does enslaved to God mean controlled by God, owned by God, or directed by God? Or something else?

[Despite the "slavery" language, it seems clear that we have freedom to choose to **offer** our bodies to Sin or to Righteousness (6:16, 19; cf. 12:1). Thus, Paul's words in v. 19, "in human terms," probably indicates that he is using an imperfect analogy. We are not actually slaves in the sense of having no freedom of will; rather we are slaves in this sense that we owe our complete allegiance to God, to do God's will.]

- Does "death" come as a punishment (wage paid) by God for sin/lawlessness, or is it the natural result of sinful living? [Although elsewhere in Romans Paul alludes to punishment for sin (e.g. 5:9, the "wrath of God"), here he seems to have in mind, the spiritual death that occurs when we live in sin—we are cut off from God and from the true essence of spiritual life. Sin kills life.]
- What exactly is the basis of salvation according to these verses? Does eternal life come because we live righteously (without sinning), or because we are made righteous by God, owned by God and protected by God's promises?

# **Exegetical Highlights of Philippians**

# Outline of Philippians

- A. Introduction: Epistolary Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:1-11)
- B. Paul's Imprisonment and Implicit Example of Steadfast Mental Attitude (1:12-26)
- C. Exhortation to Steadfastness (1:27-4:1) 1:27-30 key; 2:5-13
  - 1. Contend together in unity
  - 2. Don't be intimidated by opponents
  - 3. Examples: Christ, Timothy, Epaphroditus (incl. travel plans)
  - 4. Warning against dogs et al. and false theology (chap. 3)
- D. Recapitulation and Further Examples and Application (4:2-9)
- E. Final Affirmations and Encouragement to Faith and Faithfulness (4:10-20)

1:27-30 is the **hermeneutical key** to the whole letter. In these four verses, Paul states the major proposition for his argument (*propositio*),<sup>56</sup> which he expresses as an exhortation (1:27-28), along with a reason (*ratio*) in support of the appeal (1:29-30). Further, Paul introduces or expresses most of the key concepts for the entire letter in 1:27-30 as well: political identity, Gospel, ambiguity over future events, steadfastness, unity, faith, witness, fear/fearlessness, perspective on adversaries, salvation/destruction, concern for suffering, God's role in the believers' lives, and the values and experiences shared by Paul and the Philippians.

The Apostle Paul's appeal to the Philippians qualifies as deliberative rhetoric with the goal of trying to persuade/dissuade. More specifically, it fits generally into the important political category of subjects dealing with appropriate attitudes and behavior of citizens in time of war. Paul presents the situation of the Philippians as a conflict with opponents in which they need to develop strategies for both withstanding the attacks and carrying out their objectives successfully.

The Call to Exercise Your Citizenship Worthily of the Gospel! (Philippians 1:27-30)

- A. Politeuesthe axios —Exercise your citizenship worthily....
  - 1. An imperative with a political connotation. (The first command of the letter.)
  - 2. The Gospel calls for worthy behavior
  - 3. As you are citizens of a Roman colony, so you are citizens of a heavenly commonwealth (see 3:20).
  - 4. Paraphrase: Know your spiritual identity and live accordingly in an exemplary manner!
- B. Stand firm in one spirit. = Paul's way to live worthily of his Christian identity
  - 1. Stand firm = hold your position.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup>Italicized words in parentheses are the technical terms used in ancient rhetoric.

- 2. In one spirit... = unity
- 3. Contend for the <u>faith of the Gospel</u> together side by side as one unit.

εὖαγγελιον is a key word in Paul's proposition statement, which is a technical term both in the ruler cult, designating the accession of the emperor, and among Christians, designating the "good news" about their own Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.<sup>57</sup> By employing this word in the context of urging behavior worthy of citizens, Paul reminds them of the claim Nero has on them, but implies that it is less significant than the claim of Christ. Thus, within the specific metaphor of military service, as Roman citizens are expected to defend and fight for their emperor, Paul calls the Philippian Christians all the more to remain resolute in their loyalty to their Lord in the face of hostile rejection and opposition.

*Pistis* means faith, but there is a technical use of the term in ancient political contexts. Sometimes pistis can mean a pledge of loyalty.

Thus, in this first participial phrase of Paul's argument (μια ψυχη συναθλουντες τη πίστει του εὐαγγελίου, 1:27d), he reiterates in more graphic language the principal statement "to stand firm," which he has chosen to define what is meant by "exercising one's citizenship worthily of the Gospel of Christ." In light of Paul's political/military allusions and use of pregnant terms with multiple meanings, one may amplify and paraphrase the first participial phrase this way: [Stand firm in one spirit,] "taking a position side by side to each other as one unit, [contending] for the alliance formed under the banner of the ascended Lord [Jesus Christ], [who has pledged himself to you, and] to whom you have pledged yourselves."

4. Do not be intimidated by those who oppose you.

We do not know the identity of their opponents. The context suggests "outsiders", since talking about internal opponents would make no sense, and he is addressing the whole congregation here. Cf. 4:3, where he addresses a conflict between specific insiders.

- 5. Your faith is a <u>sign</u> of their destruction and of your salvation—which is from God.
- 6. The Philippians share the same <u>calling</u> and grace that Paul has.
- You have been graced by God not only to <u>believe</u>, but also to <u>suffer</u> on behalf of Christ.
- You have the same "battle" that Paul has.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> See Timothy C. Geoffrion, *The rhetorical purpose and the political and military character of Philippians: a call to stand firm.* (Lewiston, Mellen Biblical Press, 1993), p. 62.

#### **Modern and Post-Modern Sensitivities**

Christology is informed by both beliefs (concepts) and experience. Historically, systematic and dogmatic theology has been done intellectually. This is what is sometimes called a "modern" approach to theology in that it focuses on absolute statements (abstract, "objective" truth claims about who Christ is.) This what we find in Colossians 1:15-23.

A post-modern view is far more subjective and focuses on individual experiences. Post-modern thinkers assume that there are not universal, absolute truths. Instead, what matters is what each of us experiences personally (or perhaps as a group). When this comes to theology, a post-modern theologian will be more interested in how one experiences God and Christ than on what historic theologians (perhaps including Paul) teach about who Christ is.

In short, Medieval theology emphasized dogmatic beliefs; the Modern period emphasized reason and what could be proven; Post-Modernism emphasizes personal, subjective experience.

With post-modern sensibilities in mind, we should note that Paul himself does not just offer unprovable, abstract truth-claims about Jesus Christ in his letters. At times, he also appeals to the experience of his readers.

Example: 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10 where Paul mixes his own beliefs in an objective Gospel (God loves them and has chosen them) with an appeal to their own subjective experience (power, conviction, faith, action, hospitality, transformation).

1Th. 1:4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 1Th. 1:5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with **power**, with **the Holy Spirit** and with **deep conviction**. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

<u>1Th. 1:6</u> You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. <u>1Th. 1:7</u> And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

<u>1Th. 1:8</u> The **Lord's message rang out from you** not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it,

<u>1Th. 1:9</u> for they themselves report what **kind of reception you gave us**. They tell how you **turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God**,

<u>1Th. 1:10</u> and **to wait for his Son** from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

#### **Theories of Atonement**

Most of the theories of atonement were developed after the New Testament was completed but are based more or less on extrapolations from biblical teachings. The following summary is based on the work of progressive, modern theologian, Tony Jones.<sup>58</sup>

1. Penal Substitution (Anselm's Satisfaction theory)

See 1 John 2:2; 4:10; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Paul (e.g., Rom. 3:25; 1 Cor. 15:3)

2. Union with God (Orthodox Church)

Cross = God's invitation into God's love

3. Ransom Captive (Early Church)

See Mark 10:45. God tricked Satan (e.g., C.S. Lewis)

4. Christus Victor (Aulen, Greg Boyd)

See Hebrews 2:17. Christ conquered death by entering into it.

5. Moral Exemplar (Peter Abelard)

See 1 Peter 2:21. Christ shows us the way.

6. The Last Scapegoat (Modern view: René Girard)

Idea: The scapegoat is actually innocent; but the community is guilty.

7. Substitution, Without the Penal (Mirsolav Volf)

Idea: Christ's death repairs the rupture in our relationship with God. In this view, Christ is the "inclusive substitution". Jesus is the God who was wronged.

Tony Jones, Ph.D., writes in a very accessible style laying out briefly the main theories of atonement on a lay level in arguing against original sin (but not against the reality of sin in everyone's life) and in favor of a "better (theory of) atonement." Tony ultimately offers a pastiche of multiple views, favoring some more highly than others and being particularly indebted to Jûrgen Moltmann. Tony emphasizes "God's solidarity with us," and sees in Jesus's life and death God's solidarity with the marginalized and the oppressed, those "who most acutely experience godforsakenness," We're called, in Tony's view, to identify with Christ's suffering and death, and with his resurrection. In so doing, God opens the Trinity to us, making God's eternal love available to us.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Original version. A Better Atonement: Beyond the Depraved Doctrine of Original Sin (Minneapolis: JoPa Group, 2012). Later edition: Did God Kill Jesus: Searching for Love in History's Most Famous Execution (HarperCollins, 2015).

# Comment on the significance of Hebrews in light of John Hick's views

John Hick argues that blood is not necessary to obtain God's forgiveness. While it is certainly true that there are individual examples in Scripture of Jesus forgiving (e.g., the woman caught in adultery, the Syro-Phoenician woman, the paralytic, etc.) without requiring sacrifices (as far as know), Jesus still taught and operated within a broader religious system that required animal sacrifices for atonement. The book of Hebrews was written to affirm that the shedding of blood is a central concept in atonement in the Hebrew tradition and lays the groundwork for understanding Jesus' death and sacrifice from a Christian perspective.

From a contextual theological point of view, one might argue that any Christian theology growing out of the Jewish theological context would naturally include blood sacrifice, because of ancient Israel's dependence on animal sacrifice. The question for modern Christian theologians is, is the concept of blood sacrifice for atonement only relevant for those cultures (such as ancient Israel) that already believe in blood sacrifice for forgiveness prior to looking to Christ for salvation? Or, is the teaching that has come down to us in both Old and New Testaments regarding the necessity of blood sacrifice true for all cultures, everywhere in all times?

Similarly, the Apostle Paul (not the author of Hebrews) emphasized the role of Jesus' blood in atonement. The Apostle Paul was Jewish, but he is best known for separating the Gospel from the Law in order to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. As did the author of the letter to the Hebrews, Paul felt it was important to include the concept of the shed blood of Christ for atonement in his preaching and teaching.

#### Examples:

Rom. 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—

Rom. 5:9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

1Cor. 10:16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? 1Cor. 11:25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

1Cor. 11:27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

Eph. 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

Eph. 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

<u>Col. 1:20</u> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

#### James and Buddhism

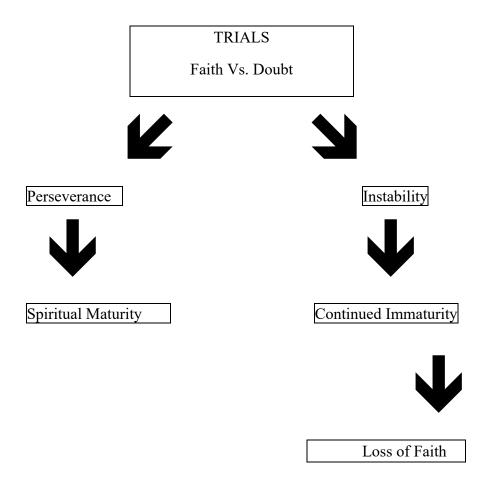
What is personal identity from a Christian point of view?

Interfaith dialogue raises the question of identity, because different religions have different conceptions of the individual identity. For example, one of the key philosophical tenets of Buddhism is the concept of "no self"—everything is transient (impermanent) and we are all connected to one another, and thus do not live in isolation from others. Nirvana is the ultimate experience of bliss when one is no longer "one" but completely detached from the individual human experience of life.

Christianity, too, recognizes the transiency of life, but insists upon the reality of the individual identity, even if it is evolving and being transformed through a relationship with Christ. But what is that identity? It is inseparable from others within the body of Christ. Each NT writer has a different way of expressing Christian identity, but all recognize that the individual exists within the context of community. In the Gospels, we read Jesus calling for believers to die to themselves and give up their lives in order to save their lives, and to follow him (as a group). For Paul, he is only concerned with what our identity is once we are believers in Christ. A Christian's identity is "in Christ," and as such we join all those who are similarly in Christ. Together, and only all together, we form Christ's body. Former Archbishop of Canterbury (Anglican) rightly notes that Christians should view themselves as existing "only as members of the Body," in which they "area lost as separate 'selfhoods' and found as members of Christ and of one another." <sup>59</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 45.

# 2 Ways to Respond to Trials



Note: New Testament writers would agree in part with 1<sup>st</sup> Noble Truth of Buddhism: Everyone does indeed suffer. For Christians, the source/cause of our suffering is sin, living in a fallen world, and the mysterious will of God. For Buddhists it is our immoral actions and selfish desires, resulting in bad karma. The response to our trials and suffering for Christians is to repent of sin and look for God to work in our suffering for good. For Buddhists, it is detaching from all desires that produce suffering.

# Persecution and Theological Perspectives in 1 Peter

Purpose of 1 Peter: Wide debate

- 1. Traditional (e.g., Selwyn) Peter wrote to encourage the community to remain strong in the face of persecution, recognizing that their identity as "strangers in the world" is related to their spiritual identity.
- 2. David Balch: "Peter" wrote to urge accommodation by being good noncitizens, and thus avoid persecution
- 3. J. Elliot: "Peter" wrote to help community define itself as a "household of God", different from, but not inferior to non-believing neighbors who had a higher social status

Causes of Persecution: There were various causes for the persecution, from pagans (polytheists who lived in the country) and Jews alike.

- 1. Social backlash for the Christians' unwillingness to participate in revelry of the townspeople. Christians seemed anti-social to pagans. They could not understand why Christians did not participate in the festivals and feasts of the towns and villages. This withdrawal of themselves from the revelry and immorality in which they had previously participated was looked upon with suspicion and resented.
- 2. Antagonism over perceived "atheism" of Christians, who did not believe in the Greco-Roman gods.
- 3. Christian leaders may have been perceived as revolutionaries. The Gospel could easily be seen as bringing division among families and friends, rather than peace--a clear priority of the Roman government and thus of all loyal cities and states within the Empire. Christians believed their Jesus was Lord of Lords and in one God thus not permitting Christ to be easily added to the pantheon.
- 4. Refusal of Christians to participate in emperor cult or other local cults of allegiance to political leaders
- 5. Economic threat to local businesses. There were those whose livelihood or way of life was threatened by the gospel. Fortunetellers, those making use of demon-possessed children, idol-craftsmen etc. easily might have lost business due to exorcisms and conversions to Christ.
- 6. Outrage over alleged cannibalism (at the Lord's supper)
- 7. Persecution of Jews who found the teachings of Christians heretical, offensive, or threatening. According to Luke's programmatic description of Paul's ministry, the Jews were a source of hostility. On more than one occasion, the religious Jews were reported to have stirred up the crowds against the missionaries and Christians.

Context: Hostility from Rome

1. Nero

It seems clear that the first official persecution of the Christians at the hands of Rome began under Nero (See Caird, p. 163f.) When Nero burned Rome in 64AD, he needed a scapegoat for which he turned to the Christians. Later the charge of arson was dropped and a charge of hatred of the human race was substituted. After a period in which Christians were hideously and cruelly tortured and murdered, the Roman people backed off their vicious attacks on the people and withdrew their support for Nero's atrocities. Nevertheless, the police regulations instituted by Nero continued in force throughout the Flavian period (d. 117) and resulted in sporadic persecutions (Caird, p. 171).

# 2. Domitian (A.D. 81-96)

Tradition has assumed that a second flare up of persecution occurred in the final two decades of the first century under the auspices of Domitian. However little evidence is available to substantiate this. What can be said is that Domitian's insecurity led him to call for the worship of him from all his subjects; and that furthermore, he threatened to persecute any who failed to comply with his demands. Ca. AD 95 Domitian called himself "Savior" "Lord" and "God", and had statues of himself built, demanded sacrifices to be offered to show allegiance to him (emperor cult).

Thus, since Christians could not have in good conscience obeyed this order, they would have been prime candidates for attack. Yet to what extent persecution took place is unknown.

Theological Perspectives on Christian Identity (1 Peter 1:1-2)

A. Eklektoi (ἐκλεκτοί) cf.: Pauline language of election (cf. Rom 9)

- 1. Theological Note: Election is for sanctification (cf. Rom 8:29), which leads to or effects "obedience and sprinkling of blood" (metaphor is from rite after pledge of fidelity to Yahweh: Exodus 24:7-8). Thus, the election of God of Christians is based on the Jewish covenant, whereby Yahweh initiates the relationship by choosing his people, who, in turn, were called to pledge their faith and obedience to him. Blood was used to ratify or seal the covenant. After the initial establishment of the covenant, blood was used to renew the covenant when there had been violations of it. Thus we can understand the connection between the shedding of blood and forgiveness, and the NT concept of the blood of the covenant.
- 2. 1 Peter is undoubtedly a key influence on the RCC doctrine of "imparted righteousness" that "sanctifies" and enables believers to live obediently. (Cf. Reformed view that righteousness is "imputed".) Sin committed by the baptized Christian then becomes a problem because it sullies what was made clean; if "blamelessness" is required for salvation, then the sacraments of continual confession and forgiveness and "last rites" become logical extensions. The Protestant alternative focuses on righteousness as "imputed"; the sinner remains a

sinner in the sense of imperfection; salvation is not dependent on total sanctification, but rather on the mercy of God who saves sinners.

- B. *Parepidemoi* (παρεπίδημοι) "alongside the people there" = resident aliens (1:1; 2:11)
  - 1. Elliot seizes upon this term to argue from sociological perspective that Peter is addressing a certain "underclass" group, at least non-citizens in foreign countries (but as not as low as "strangers", *Home for Homeless*, 37-39). All such terms describe both religious and sociological circumstances in 1 Peter (*Home for the Homeless*, 42). Elliot maintains that Peter was not alluding to an earthly "pilgrimage" (*Home for Homeless*, 45).
  - 2. Lightfoot, Selwyn, et al. παροικους και παρεπιδημους (sojourners and resident aliens/foreigners). The "idea of Christians as sojourners in the world came to be felt as so expressive of their condition that παροικῖα (1:17; 2:11) became a common term for a Christian community in a place: hence our word 'parish'" (Selwyn, 118).
  - 3. Thus, interpretive question: Are these Christians literally resident aliens or is this metaphorical language describing the nature of the Christian church? or both? If it is the former, then this letter may speak more powerfully to those who feel marginalized by society. If it is the former, it may be a word of challenge to those who might not see their call to be Christian witnesses in society.

# **Mini-Systematic Biblical Theology**

(Based on 7 categories often used in doing systematic theology)

# A. God (Theology)

**Q**. What are the chief characteristics of God repeatedly portrayed in the Bible?

**Read Psalm 103.** (Initiator, Guider, Healer, Forgiver, Redeemer, Merciful, Renewer, Satisfier, Liberator, Everlasting, The Way, Gracious, Patient (Slow to anger), Steadfast Lover/Loving, Compassionate, Generous, Powerful, Father, Creator, Understanding, Holy, Righteous, Eternal, Praiseworthy, Judges sin/Just,) Characteristics include the following:

- 1. Gracious: God's initiates on behalf of humanity to save us, apart from our merit (covenant; Jesus Christ's death)
- 2. Merciful (provides forgiveness, i.e., grace to those who deserve punishment)

Note: Grace gives to us what we do not deserve (gifts and blessings). Mercy does not give to us what we do deserve (punishment)

- 3. Compassionate (tender care for the poor and needy, and compassionate Father who understands our frailty and human nature)
- 4. Judges Sin (characteristic = just)
  - a. The horrible, natural consequences of sin (destroys individuals, communities, nations, and ultimately the world)
  - b. God's response: accountability and consequence
- 5. Provider (from clothes in the garden, to manna in the desert, grace, help in time of need, and eternal salvation)
- 6. Community Creating God: Holiness, Sanctification

In sum: God is a gracious and loving God, full of compassion, mercy, and justice. He is powerful to save and will provide ultimate victory over evil; but his relationship to the origin and prevalence of evil, and the continual struggle/battle between good and evil, is not altogether clear from Scripture.

"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, (Exodus 34:6)

- 7. See, too, Deut. 32:4. "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he."
- 8. Concerning God's attitude toward people outside of the Judeo-Christian faiths, see Psalm 145:8-21. These verses speak of God's love and justice for all his creation. Now, the writer may have had only the Jews in mind, but he mentions "all he has made" (145:17). The criteria to benefit from God's loving kindness is not ethnicity but "calling on him" "calling on him in truth" "fearing him" "crying out to him for salvation" and "loving him." His conclusion: "Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever" (145:21).
- 9. All powerful? In addition to the attributes listed above, God has traditionally been thought of as all powerful (omnipotent), all knowing (omniscient), and present everywhere (omnipresent).
- 10. The problem of evil challenges the above notions, especially God's omnipotence: That is, if God is all good and all powerful, what explains the presence and power of evil in the world? Different answers, including:
  - a. God carves out freedom in creation, including freedom to reject him and to do evil. Thus he is not the author of evil, but allows it. He either chooses not to intervene, or is actually, in a sense, "powerless" to help in some circumstances by his own design.
  - b. Rev. Greg Boyd, Ph.D. argues for a "spiritual warfare worldview" in which God is in continual battle with the forces of evil. God will overcome, but since the beginning of time God's will has been pitted against the will of other forces. Humans suffer as casualties in this spiritual battle. We also are perpetrators of evil ourselves at times. However, by Christ's power, we can also fight the forces of evil, too. Boyd and others make this argument, in part, to vindicate God of the charge of not being good. Instead of blaming God for evil, we should think of God as having his hands "tied", so to speak, for reasons we cannot fully grasp. We should then turn our attention to the cross to see that God suffers with humanity as a victim himself of evil (Moltmann).
  - c. No matter what solution is proposed to the problem of evil, we're still left with our pain and unanswered questions. We can never go so far as to say, "Oh now I understand why women and children are brutalized, the vulnerable are exploited and abused, and the good often die young." There remain theological questions that all proposed answers cannot fully answer.

# B. Jesus Christ (Christology)

1. Early Church concluded that the best way to do justice to the teaching of the New Testament was to affirm that Jesus Christ was both truly human and truly divine. While an analysis of the various NT texts reveals varying portrayals of both Jesus' humanity and his divinity, there can be no question that every author understood him

- as both human and having access to divine power and qualities in an unparalleled way (contra Borg, Hick, et al.)
- 2. How does the New Testament describe the titles and functions of Jesus Christ? (Savior, Messiah (Christ), Lord, Son of Man, Emmanuel, Word of God, Redeemer, Liberator, Way/Truth/Life, Mediator, Shepherd, High Priest, Counselor, King of kings, Bread, Light, Prince of Peace, Example, Friend, Brother)
- 3. Key work: Reveals the invisible God; saves humanity from the power and consequences of sin (Savior); functions as Lord of the universe; provides an ethical example to follow

# C. Holy Spirit = Christ's Spirit (Pneumatology)

- 1. Gives life to every human being (Genesis 2:7; Psalm 104:29-30)
- 2. Convicts of sin (John 16:7-11)
- 3. Guides us to truth and enables us to have faith in Jesus (John 14:6; 16:13-15; Eph. 2:8)
- 4. Makes us spiritually alive in a renewed relationship with God (John 3:1-8, 16; 7:37-39; 20:19-23
- 5. Gives power to resist sin and to live at peace (Rom. 8:1-6; Gal. 5:16)
- 6. Produces "fruit", i.e., beautiful qualities in our life (Gal. 5:22-23)
- 7. Helps us pray (Rom 8:26-27; 1 Cor. 14:2, 18; Eph. 4:18)
- 8. Gifts and empowers us for Christian service (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3-8; 15:18-19; Eph. 4:11-16)
- 9. Empowers us to fight evil (Eph. 6:10-20, see esp. vv. 17-18, Sword of the Spirit, pray in the Spirit)

**Note:** The critical roles of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the New Testament have led me to a Trinity-Centric theology (versus a Theo-centric or Christocentric theology).

#### D. Soteriology

- 1. God provides salvation by his grace to those who have faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and who follow him as their Lord.
- 2. Salvation is accomplished by the will of God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and yet is "worked out" throughout the life time of a believer.

### E. Ecclesiology

- 1. The Church is the body of Christ. (1 Cor 12)
- 2. The Church exists to glorify God, to nurture believers in Christ, and to serve as a witness in the world. (Eph 4; Rom 12; 1 Cor 12)
- 3. As the body of Christ, the Church picks up Jesus' ministry to announce good news to the poor, oppressed and suffering. (Luke 4)
- 4. The church is also charged with making disciples of all nations. (Matt. 28:19)

James Dunn: The church of God as the body of Christ is the fulfillment of Israel as people of God.

Frank Matera: The church is part of Israel, but does not replace historic Israel. (See Matera's Romans commentary.)

# F. Eschatology

- 1. The end times were inaugurated with the coming of Jesus Christ. (Acts 2)
- 2. The decisive act of God in history was the self-revelation in Jesus, combined with the sacrificial death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus.
- 3. The Holy Spirit was given to Christians in order to enable followers of Christ to serve God's purposes in this end time.
- 4. The end times will be fulfilled at the (second) coming of Jesus Christ.
- 5. All will be judged by God, both Christians and non-Christians.. E.g., "You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat" (Romans 14:10; cf. Hebrews 9:27).
- 6. Key interpretative issues:
  - a. What of these prophecies are to be taken literally, which symbolically?

For example, are the resurrection of Jesus and the second coming to be taken literally or symbolically?

b. When is eschatology truly a vision for the kingdom of God in the present? When does it point to God's actions at the end of time?

In general, NT eschatology affirms that God is active in history (salvation history), most notably in Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. What God does in these fulfills Scripture and looks for further fulfilment at the end of time. This does not mean that Christians are not to try to build community based on kingdom values now.

c. What does fulfillment look like? What is the Christian "hope"? How will fulfillment come about? (The work of the Holy Spirt through the Church? Human effort? God's miraculous intervention over evil?)

# G. Ethics/Discipleship

- 1. Human conduct is to mirror the character of God, and thus we are to be "holy as God is holy". (E.g., 1 Pet. 1:15-16)
- 2. Covenant theology underscores the communal nature of humanity—we are to understand ourselves in relationship with God and with others, especially with others who put their faith in God and follow Jesus Christ. (E.g., Eph. 2:10-22)
- 3. Love is the most important character quality for those who know, obey, and serve God. (E.g., Luke 10:27; 1 Cor. 8:3; Eph. 5:1-2; 1 John 3:10)
- 4. Ethical behavior is subsumed under discipleship for followers of Jesus Christ. (E.g., John 15:5-15)

James Dunn: Ethics is "theology lived out in personal and communal life."

# **Key Scripture Passages for Preaching and Teaching the New Testament**

Class Goal Number 4: To reflect on how to present a coherent Gospel message and helpful teaching on practical Christian living within the context of a local church, given the complexity of NT theological interpretation. In addition to the material presented in the lecture on the unity of the biblical message(s), the following passages provide helpful material to present core theological and practical messages of the New Testament.

<u>The Roman Road to Salvation</u> is a way to talk about Paul's soteriology as expressed in the book of Romans. The verses below address key aspects of his theology.

- 1. Romans 3:21-25 (All have sinned and fall short of God's expectations.)
- 2. Romans 6:21-23 (The consequence of human sin is death, physical and spiritual.)
- 3. Romans 5:8 (God's love bridges the gap between God and humans and is expressed powerfully in the death of Jesus Christ for sinners.)
- 4. Romans 8:1, 5-8, 11-14 (There is no condemnation for those in Christ, and the Holy Spirit is given to us to enable us to follow Christ and live a new life.)
- 5. Romans 8:28-39 (Nothing can separate believer's in Christ from God's love.)
- 6. Romans 10:9-10 (We must believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess with our mouths that we have put our faith in Christ for salvation.)
- 7. Romans 12:1-21 (Those who receive God's mercy are expected to give their lives as a living sacrifice to serve God and love others.)

#### From Matthew

- 1. Matthew 6:19-25; 33-34
- 2. Matthew 15:10-20
- 3. Matthew 22:34-40

#### From Mark

- 1. Mark 8:34-38
- 2. Mark 10:45

#### From Luke

- 1. Luke 1:51-53
- 2. Luke 4:14-30
- 3. Luke 19:10
- 4. Luke 24:47

### From the Gospel of John

- 1. John 1:12-14
- 2. John 3:16-18
- 3. John 10:7-11
- 4. John 11:25
- 5. John 14:1-6
- 6. John 15:1-5

### From Acts

- 1. Acts 4:12
- 2. Acts 5:29

# From Galatians

- 1. Galatians 5:13-25
- 2. Galatians 6:1-2
- 3. Galatians 6:7-10

# From Ephesians

- 1. Ephesians 2:8-10
- 2. Ephesians 4:22-23
- 3. Ephesians 4:31-5:2
- 4. Ephesians 6:10-18

# From Philippians

- 1. Philippians 1:3-6
- 2. Philippians 1:27-30
- 3. Philippians 2:1-13
- 4. Philippians 4:4-9

### From Colossians

- 1. Colossians 1:9-24
- 2. Colossians 1:27
- 3. Colossians 3:15-17

# From 1 Timothy

- 1. 1 Timothy 4:12-16
- 2. 1 Timothy 6:17-19

# From 2 Timothy

- 1. 2 Timothy 2:1-2, 15
- 2. 2 Timothy 3:14-17

# From Titus

- 1. Titus 3:3-7
- 2. Titus 2:11-14

### From the book of Hebrews

- 1. Hebrews 4:12-16
- 2. Hebrews 9:22, 27-28
- 3. Hebrews 12:1-3

# From James

- 1. James 1:1-8
- 2. James 1:26-27

3. James 2:14-17

# From Peter

- 1. 1 Peter 1:3-21
- 2. 1 Peter 3:15-16
- 3. 2 Peter 1:3-11

# From John's First Epistle

- 1. 1 John 1:5-10
- 2. 1 John 4:7-12
- 3. 1 John 4:16-21

# From Revelation

- 1. Revelation 7:9-17
- 2. Revelation 21:1-7

# **Examples of How Christian Sub-Cultures Vary from One Another**

Consider the following (over-) generalizations based on the instructor's experience. Various denominations, in various contexts, tend to emphasize different aspects of God and Christian spirituality. They don't necessarily disagree in any fundamental way, but the forms of worship and language they use will vary, sometimes significantly.

- The Presbyterians often are uncomfortable with talk about an active Holy Spirit. Teaching needs to be orderly and reasonable, and not too scary.
- The Lutherans, who emphasize *sola fidei and sola gratia*, generally oppose using the word "decision" or any other such word that might sound like a "work" to them. Teaching needs to emphasize God's grace and "responding" to God's grace.
- The Baptists tend to be law and rules-oriented. Sometimes, they can be resistant to any suggestion that believers need to be anointed by the Holy Spirit. Teaching needs to be grounded in Scripture and mindful of how the teaching will affect the behavior of community members. Beware of getting drawn into unproductive theological debates.
- Calvinists emphasize God's sovereignty and the election (predestination) of believers, while Arminians insist on human free will and the possibility of losing one's salvation. Contextualized preaching will be alert to which end of the spectrum the audience is on.
- Africans are often very kinesthetic, feeling oriented, and live close to the ground and in their bodies. Preaching and teaching needs to be lively and practical.
- Northern Europeans tend to be "colder" and more intellectual, and suspicious of overly emotional religion. Preaching and teaching needs to be sober-minded and thoughtful.
- Americans are quite diverse, reflecting their many different backgrounds. In general, conservatives insist on a solid Scriptural basis for theology and are suspicious of new ways of doing theology or applying Scripture that might upset their traditional ways of thinking. Liberal intellectuals want theology to be philosophically sophisticated, and may not care if I use Scripture or not. Liberal activists want theology to underpin their social agendas. Moderates tend to be reasonable thinking-oriented Christians, who are caught in the middle between the fighting of the right- and left-wing positions. Some moderates need encouragement to clarify their beliefs and serve Christ more passionately, while others are complacent or fearful in their "centrist" position and need to be challenged to take a stand and get involved.
- Charismatics and many African-Americans need to "feel" what I'm preaching and teaching.
- Asians, in general, are very community conscious. They tend to think first about the group, before they think about the individual. Asian Christians, along with Central and South American Christians, are often trying to cope with serious political, social, and

economic issues. Theological preaching and teaching need to address real community experience and needs as well as hope for life after death.

• In your context?