

COURSE: NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY
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QUESTION 1: "The New Testament Theology" is the title of some academic syllabi (courses). Does it exist?

The word 'theology' comes from two Greek words '*Theos*' and '*Logos*' meaning 'God' and 'word', such that its definition is 'words about God' or simply 'teachings/study about God'. However, a more traditional explanation is that theology is the science (organized study) of God, the universe, and particularly human beings in it, and their relationship.¹ New Testament Theology is the exposition of the NT in grammatical, historical and cultural terms. It signifies the exposition (exegesis) of the circumstances and convictions of Jesus, the apostles and the Early Church during the apostolic days, as set forth in the canonical writings of the NT and as elucidated by means of related bodies of literature and contemporary data.

As a discipline, New Testament Theology is a historical discipline i.e. it focuses on how within the NT and even within a writer's works themes have evolved and how the particular historical context influences their writings.² It is that branch of the Christian disciplines which traces themes through the authors of the NT and then amalgamates those individual motifs into a single comprehensive whole. In other words, NTT is one segment of the larger enterprise called Biblical theology, which seeks to trace the origins and growth of Biblical teaching and to set forth the various types of doctrine (theologies) apparent in the different writers.³

However, in biblical theology today there exist a growing stress on diversity rather than unity and the failure to attain any consensus whatever as to methodology or content. It is because

¹ Cf. J. Julius Scott, Jr. *New Testament Theology: A new study of the thematic structure of the New Testament*, (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2008), p.17-18

² Cf. Mark Alroy Mascrenghé, "Towards a Genre Based New Testament Theology." *American journal of Biblical Theology* (June 2015), Vol 16, Iss26., p.3

³ Cf. *New Testament Theology*, <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/New-Testament-Theology>.

of this reality that the idea of a “The New Testament Theology” is contestable, hence the perplexity of using the definite article ‘the’ in the title of the course which would suggest a ‘one NTT’ in the strict sense. But in a loosed sense, to say that there is ‘one NTT’ entails that the different authors said different yet compatible or even complementary things; such that even if it is possible that they said totally different things (due to various reasons; emphasis, audience, personal experience), it doesn’t affect the ‘oneness’ of NTT. There is only one message of Jesus Christ. Therefore, despite the complexity of issues surrounding NT Theology and the lack of consensus on either its task or its method, it has been called "the summit, as it were, to which the arduous mountain paths of New Testament exegesis lead, and the vantage point from which one can look back upon them."⁴

QUESTION 2A: The importance of the Old Testament for the theological study of the New Testament

In the development of biblical theology, many biblical scholars have postulated theories concerning the relationship between the OT and NT. While some (Marcion to Bultmann) have posited an absolute dichotomy between the testaments, and others (A.A. van Ruler) elevate OT over NT or take a purely Christological approach to the OT (Hengstenberg, Vischer), none does full justice to the two testaments. For instance, while a completely Christological approach guards against the tendency to historicize the OT away from promise-fulfillment, it leads to a subjective spiritualizing of the OT which denies its intended meaning.⁵

As a result, any true biblical theology must recognize the centrality of the relationship between the testaments, bearing in mind the issue of diversity and unity such that the various parts of both Testaments must be allowed to speak for themselves, but the unity of these parts must be

⁴ J. R. DONAHUE, “The changing shape of New Testament Theology”, *Theological Studies* 50 (1989), p. 315-317.

⁵ Cf. <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txw/newtheo.htm>

recognized and guarded. Several aspects demand this unity: the historical continuity between the testaments; the centrality of the OT for the NT; the promise-fulfillment theme of the NT; the messianic hope of the OT and its place as a 'pedagogue'. Therefore, the most productive approach would be a pattern of unity and continuity (Hasel) such that the OT looks forward to the NT and the NT depends upon the OT for its identity; this is because both OT and NT are valid aspects of God's ongoing redemptive activity in history.

Following from the above, we must keep in mind that Christianity is an offshoot of Judaism; meaning that the early Christians were first faithful Jews who believed in the authority of Israel's sacred writings (the TaNaKh, i.e. the Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim) and were familiar with them. Thus, even after embracing the new faith they depended heavily on the TaNaKh, and took it as their authority to encounter the Jews and the people of their time. This dependence is to prove that there is an accord between the OT and NT since both entails a movement of revelation; the NT is a fulfillment of the OT, and this culminates in Jesus. Jesus himself made reference to the OT in his preaching and teaching because his principle opponents, who are experts of the Law and traditions, needed to be convinced about the genuineness of his teaching and mission; that he is the fulfillment of what was promised, the 'Messiah' announced by the prophets.

From the foregoing, we can boldly assert that the OT is very important for the theological study of the NT. Hence, * the OT is an ongoing revelation of the Father, which attains its fulfillment in Jesus in the NT; * the theology of the NT cannot be complete without the OT; * the OT is not simply to be used as a reference tool in making quotation or allusions to themes or motifs in the NT; * it is an important determining factor for theologizing and developing (form and shape) Christian teachings that are essential for faith and practical living; * as such, there must be an objective use of the OT in the NT.