

3.1 Introduction to the New Testament

Discussion Date: 1-21-2007

Goal: read and come with Qs and comments to help one another

Key texts for meditation: Jn 13.7, 20; 14.25-26; 15.26; 16.12-13

If you can do only a little reading in advance, focus on these texts

1A. The “Bible” of the early church

When the church began after the death and resurrection of Christ, there was no NT; the church’s Bible was the OT. However, right *from the beginning, the church had the essence* of the NT in two ways. First, the church had memories, reports, and information about the sayings of Jesus. Second, the church had the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2.42), which authoritatively reported on the work of Christ per the Lord’s commission (Jn 16.12, 13).

Therefore, it is somewhat misleading to say that the early church only had the OT as its Bible. Perhaps, it is better to say that from the beginning the early church had the teaching of the OT, Jesus, and the apostles. Then, in time and according to the Lord’s promise, the apostles oversaw the writing of the teaching of Jesus and their interpretation of His teaching, and the result was the NT canon added to the OT canon with equal authority as the word of God.

2A. The Purpose of the Bible

The Bible is special redemptive revelation to sinners fallen from the image of God and in need of restoration to that image by a divine means outside of themselves. We can itemize:

Bible: 66 books (OT/NT; promise/fulfillment)

Special: direct, in words

Redemptive: saving, restoring (for the glory of God)

Revelation: disclosure of the mind of God

Sinners: covenant breakers (context: redemptive history and revelation are covenantal)

Image of God: design of man to glorify God by reflection

Thus, the Bible (composed of OT and NT; promise and fulfillment), is the direct-saving-restorative word of God that reveals His mind and will in the saving of covenant breakers. He saves sinners by the work of His Son, Jesus-Messiah, in order that they may fulfill their role of glorifying and enjoying Him forever in eternal Sabbath rest purposed for man from the beginning. Redemptive deed and redemptive word are the realization of the *pactum salutis*, the eternal inter-trinitarian covenant or pact of salvation. Thus, the NT has a covenantal backbone even if that is not the literary form of the individual books; this backbone shapes our reading.

3A. The Divisions of the NT

1) The Four Divisions of the NT

Gospels

Acts

Epistles

Apocalypse

2) Three Divisions of the NT

Remembrances

Teachings

Things to Come

3) How can we compress the four into three?

What is “the odd man out”?

How can we combine the odd man out with one of the other divisions?

Q: in what sense do we get apostolic interpretation from all the NT books including the Gospels and Acts? Why is this important?

4A. Over view of the divisions of the NT

1) Remembrances: Gospels and Acts

As remembrances of what Jesus did and taught, these books show us the historical and factual basis of Christianity. Without history, there is no gospel because the gospel is good news that comes to us from witnesses (that is history or historical reporting). What happened puts a “new face upon life” (Machen, *NT Introduction*, 17). The Gospels tell us about what happened in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Acts tells us how *Jesus* spread the gospel seed to the Gentile world by His Spirit. Thus, the book of Acts gives us the outline of apostolic history that we need to understand the other NT books.

2) Teachings: Epistles

These are actual letters, not simply literature cast in epistolary form. As such, they have similarities with Greek private letters preserved in the dry climate of Egypt. They are similar in letter format (such as author, body of letter, and greetings) and similar in the use of every day language rather than the language of Greek literature of the day (hence, *koine* Greek).

Differences from the letter writing of the day also show up. The letters of the NT were not usually for private consumption but for public reading in the churches. Accordingly, they reflect a loftier style than private correspondences or commercial transactions. This affects even the letter format in that opening words convey Christian truth in ways peculiar to the subject matter of the letter (cf. any letter of the NT, but note the fullness of the Rom 1.1-7 greeting)

3) Things to Come: Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation)

Why do we call Revelation the Apocalypse?

The Christian life is a life of hope and freedom that are both now and not yet, coming to be over time and yet to come in the consummate future. Machen: We are in danger of losing our hope in the trials or in the mere humdrum of life. To keep it alive, the Apocalypse opens a glorious vision of the future. The vision comes in highly symbolical language. The goal is not to help in any calculation of the times and seasons. It shows us the Lamb upon the throne-and that is enough” (Machen, 19).

What is the value of Revelation for our Christian life? Why read this book?

5A. Christianity and the Bible (cf. Machen, founder of WTS)

Is it the case that it is a reproach that Christianity is a religion of a Book (some so object to orthodoxy)? It would be if it were an ordinary book, but it is not ordinary; it is a message from God.

“When God speaks, who can refuse to hear? Obedience to him is perfect freedom.

Christianity is a religion of a Book. But what a Book! Not a dead thing, but a transforming power. A Book that has entered like iron into the fibre of men’s souls. A Book that has been transmuted gloriously, through the ages, in never-ending variety, into life. A Book that has given us God. No enslaving code. But the very charter of human freedom” (*Introduction to the NT*, 19).