

The Theology of the New Testament
George B. Stevens
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Dr. Stevens was specially qualified for the preparation of this part of the International Theological Library by his previous studies in at least two of the most prominent sections of the field of New Testament theology. Those who knew his work on *The Pauline Theology* and on *The Johannine Theology* could not but be confident that a comprehensive treatise on the entire subject of New Testament theology from the same hand would be a great gain for American theological literature. The book before us fully justifies such confidence. Even where, from the nature of the case, the present survey of the field as a whole prescribed reduced proportions for those parts the author had previously dealt with, we have found the chapters devoted to such parts something more than a mere condensation of the earlier discussion.

Notwithstanding the increased attention of late bestowed upon it, biblical theology remains enough of a recent arrival to need some sort of introduction to the average reader, though he be a theological student. Some will feel it as a serious defect that Prof. Stevens has not deemed it necessary to define in an opening chapter the nature and encyclopedic position of biblical theology as a science and theological discipline. As it is, after a brief preface, he introduces us immediately into the problem of the Synoptic Gospels as sources of the teaching of Jesus. What his real views on the nature and aims of biblical theology are must be gathered from incidental statements. On page 248 we learn that the primary task of the biblical theologian is not to trace the development of thought within the New Testament, but to expound in systematic form the contents of the New Testament books. Indeed, the mere chronological relation of books is held to be of comparatively small importance. This conception of his task seems to us to account for what we must consider the weak side of Prof. Stevens' on the whole so excellent book. He confines himself too exclusively to a systematic grouping of the exegetical data of the several writings, to the neglect not merely of the historical interdependence of the various types of teaching, but also of the still more delicate problem of the psychological interdependence of the several elements of thought in the mind of one and the same teacher or writer. We also think it doubtful whether the scientific position of biblical theology as an independent branch of study can be maintained on the principle thus formulated. It is becoming ever more widely recognized that the attempt to construct a little system of theology out of each single document is in the highest degree artificial and impracticable. Prof. Stevens himself in the execution of his task in several instances very wisely recognizes this state of affairs (cf., e.g., his remarks on the *Pauline Eschatology*, p. 482). But on the whole the spirit and interest of his work lie too much on the systematic and too little on the historical side. The modern tendency to transform biblical theology into an out-and-out historical science, represented by such men as Wrede (*Ueber Aufgabe und Methode der sogenannten N. T. Theologie*, 1897), has a certain degree of justification; although, of course, in the form in which it is championed at present, it proposes to make our science a purely naturalistic and secular branch of study, a mere subdivision of the history of religions. But surely we are not reduced to the alternative of following either the old systematizing or the new evolutionary principle of treatment. From the latter we need only learn to place greater emphasis upon the historic nexus of the several types of truth deposited in the Scriptures, without thereby abating in the least our conviction concerning the supernatural genesis and growth of the body to which they belong.

In his treatment of our Lord's synoptical teaching, Prof. Stevens well distributes the emphasis between the spiritual-organic and eschatological aspects of the kingdom conception, perhaps with a slight tendency here and there to minimize the latter. In the discussion of the title, "Son of Man," we miss a reference to the acute stage upon which the controversy about this name has entered, through the linguistic contentions of Eerdmans, Lietzmann, and recently Wellhausen, which have already led to a widespread denial of its authenticity as a self-designation on the part of Jesus. As to the title, "Son of God," Prof. Stevens recognizes that it is only synonymous, not quite identical with that of Messiah, and that Jesus Himself uses it to designate intimate fellowship between Himself and the Father. "According to the Jewish idea the Messianic King was also Son of God; according to Jesus' idea the Son of God as such was the Messianic king." Still, the author hesitates to give to that which he thus recognizes as lying back of the messianic relation a more than purely ethical content. He admits the metaphysical sonship only by way of inference from the ethical facts, not as a given element in the consciousness of Jesus, so far at least as this consciousness is reflected in the synoptical teaching. In the Fourth Gospel the element of preexistence is added to that of ethical fellowship between the Father and Son, but even here the author thinks that the ontological deity of Christ is rather forced upon us as a necessary explanation of the data than as a datum furnished by Christ Himself. It should be added that Prof. Stevens more than once gives expression to his personal belief in the essential deity of our Lord, and, in harmony with this conviction, earnestly strives to maintain the absolute and ideal character of his teaching. At a time when less and less scruple is entertained by writers in our field against ascribing mistakes to Jesus, this reverential attitude deserves sincere appreciation. Unfortunately, the author thinks it necessary, in order to maintain this position, to curtail in several directions the field in which our Lord meant His teaching to be authoritative. Jesus did not discourse upon nature or history. The fields of philosophy and science lay outside of the scope of His teaching and work. This is applied first to astronomy, then to criticism, finally also to the subject of demonology. In regard to this last-mentioned topic, the question arises how even our Lord's specifically religious teaching can be infallible, seeing it is built on premises belonging to this very sphere. His conception of the kingdom of God in one of its aspects is directly determined by its contrast to the kingdom and power of Satan. To make Satan and the demons, in all the sayings bearing on this point, conscious figures in the mind of Jesus would be an exegetical *tour de force* of which we do not think Prof. Stevens capable. The author evidently shrinks from denying the literalness of the references to the angels, but thinks that even here Jesus did not commit Himself to any positive doctrine of their nature. This is scarcely reconcilable with Mark 12:25. If on this subject our Lord spoke in the terms current in His age, so that His authority as a teacher is not committed to the ideas involved, except so far as the bare existence of superhuman good and evil beings is concerned, we do not see why the same allowance should not be made on every other point of His teaching. If this be done, it is plain as the light of day that we lose all firm ground of authority on which to base any doctrine of our Lord's teaching. Prof. Stevens' words on page 90 suggest, to be sure, that no such accommodation to popular modes of thought need be admitted within "the scope of his special teaching." But who can fail to see that this distinction between a special and not special part of our Lord's teaching is a purely abstract and unhistorical distinction, bound to break down everywhere before the concrete exigencies of the situation.

Special interest attaches to our Lord's predictions of His parousia, because this is the point to which the charge of fallibility against Jesus most frequently addresses itself. Here again an obvious effort is made by Prof. Stevens to maintain the absolute truth of our Lord's religious teaching. In some

instances this is done by purely exegetical means, sayings which seemingly refer to the parousia being interpreted of the triumphant progress of Christ's cause after His death and resurrection. So Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27 (not the parallel passage Matt. 16:28, where the reference to the parousia is held to have been imported later). In regard to Jesus' declaration before the high priest also, Prof. Stevens decides that in its original form it cannot have referred to the parousia, but leaves it undetermined whether we have the saying before us in its original form—i.e., whether exegesis or criticism ought to bring relief. In all other instances it is assumed that the parousia expectation of the disciples and not Jesus is responsible for the form in which these predictions now appear in the Gospels. So in reference to the great eschatological discourse. While not accepting Weiffenbach's hypothesis of an incorporated Jewish Christian apocalypse, the author admits that the version of Matthew involves Jesus in a tissue of contradictions, and suggests that in general the incongruities of the discourse in the other evangelists also may be best referred to subjective combinations and misapprehensions on the part of the early disciples. Nevertheless Prof. Stevens refuses to go to the extreme of making the parousia idea entirely a creation of the disciples' minds. There was a real basis for it in Jesus' teaching; it was, however, from the outset overemphasized, regarded as near at hand and surrounded by external signs and wonders. The blending of the natural crisis and the cosmical crisis in the discourse is likewise due to misapprehension of the disciples.

The reproduction of the Johannine teaching of our Lord is unfavorably affected by the author's views regarding the subjective coloring of the discourses of the Fourth Gospel. This results in setting to the account of John the greater part of the doctrinal peculiarities of the material here preserved. The reader obtains indeed the general impression that in fundamental, ethical and religious points the synoptists and John agree, but hardly obtains a correct insight into the inner doctrinal structure of the Johannine discourses. This defect is but partially remedied by the subsequent discussion of the theology of John in a separate chapter at the close of the book. We notice an excellent criticism of Wendt's and Beyschlag's interpretation of the preexistence idea in the Fourth Gospel on pages 206f.

The transition stage between the teaching of Jesus and the Pauline development is skillfully sketched, although, as indicated above, the author attaches little or no weight to the chronological sequence of the writings subsumed under this period, his opinion being expressed to the effect that James and 1 Peter represent a more primitive type of Christian belief, which must have existed before and continued to exist alongside of the Pauline teaching, even if they should prove to have been written after Paul's epistles. 2 Peter is the only document of which Prof. Stevens rejects the genuineness. Jude is assumed to be the basis of 2 Peter.

In conclusion we briefly comment upon a few features in the discussion of Paulinism. Prof. Stevens insists that no development is traceable in the apostle's writings. In regard to the various views entertained on the origin and import of Paul's notion of $\sigma\rho\xi$, we do not think the author comes quite up to the standard of his usual felicity and lucidity of statement. One not already acquainted with the debate will hardly gain a clear idea from this section of the real points at issue between the Old Testament explanation and the Hellenic theory. On pages 350f. we meet with a dogmatic-philosophic digression about Adam's primitive state and the origin of death, in which we are incidentally told that the account of Genesis on these matters is unhistorical, and in which a desperate attempt is made to square the apostle's plain statements with the modern belief, evidently

shared by the writer, that death is a law of nature and has as such no penal significance. The main point made for this purpose is the distinction between death in its purely biological sense as physical dissolution and its accompaniments of sorrow, fear, and pain. The latter would not have been, had there been no sin. But some other transition in the sense of biology would not have thereby been excluded. At the end, however, Prof. Stevens is constrained to admit that Paul held something more than this ethical interpretation of death under its pathological aspect. But, he adds, "What was more than this was incidental to his thought in consequence of his Jewish training and was not essential to his view of religion." We venture to remark that this method of presenting the matter, whatever its value as a contribution to the philosophy of the problem of death, can only obscure from the biblico-theological point of view the apostle's own fundamental convictions on the subject. In the discussion of the famous passage, Romans 5:12-14, we observe with satisfaction the following statement: "All men sinned in and with Adam in the same sense as all believers died and rose with Christ." This is a step in the right direction as compared with the still too frequent interpretation of ἐφ' ὃ πάντες ἥμαρτον of actual, individual transgression of Adam's descendants. We further learn that in both cases the connection between us and Adam or Christ is, according to Paul's conception, mystical in its kind. As the author has previously excluded the presence of any Platonic realism in the apostle's thought, and equally scouted the federal theory as a possible explanation of his trend of thought on this point, and as no further statement beyond the word "mystical" itself is made by the author, we are left in the dark as to the precise implications of this term. In connection with Paul's teaching on the death of Christ, the same feature reappears, viz., that a more or less indefinite view is attributed to the apostle, instead of the clear, well-defined theory of atonement usually ascribed to him. Christ died for sinners vicariously, but no such literal and exact substitution as the phrase ἀντὶ ἡμῶν would imply is affirmed. His sufferings and death were indeed substituted for the sinner's punishment. Christ by His death averted our penalty. But Paul's conception of substitution does not involve, it directly excludes, the view that Christ's sufferings had the moral quality of punishment, and that Christ was the object of divine wrath. Galatians 3:13, we think, ought to be a sufficient answer to this whole representation, but the author disposes of this by drawing an over-nice distinction between Christ's having become *a curse* and his having become *accursed*, only the former of which Paul affirms. We have always been inclined to think that here, as well as in 2 Corinthians 5:21, the indefinite substantive expression was the stronger of the two, and have not been convinced of the contrary by the author's reasoning. Nor can we attribute much weight to the consideration that Christ, while dying for sinners, remained the object of the Father's good pleasure. The church has never believed anything else; and yet held alongside of it the view that Christ was actually exposed to the divine wrath. Why should this have been impossible in the case of Paul? Neither the church's nor Paul's view of the divine wrath is so anthropopathic as to exclude the possibility of its coexistence with love. In Romans 5:8, 10 the coexistence of judicial enmity and love in reference to the sinner are clearly implied.

On the subjective appropriation of redemption Prof. Stevens makes Paul occupy essentially Arminian ground. The divine purpose to save cannot be apart from conditions, because the actual salvation is also conditional. Faith itself appears as man's act, not as a divine gift, and has a certain inherent moral value in connection with justification. The apostle nowhere teaches that with the exercise of faith there is in any sense connected an imputation of Christ's righteousness. Some of these positions are argued with a degree of warmth, for which a mere historical zeal to vindicate Paul from misinterpretation will not fully account. Obviously here the author's own theological predilections

intrude themselves into the discussion. In a matter which so closely concerns the fundamentals of faith this is almost inevitable. Perfect objectivity would in this case betray personal indifference to the issues at stake.

Though disagreeing with Prof. Stevens in most of the conclusions briefly touched upon in the foregoing, we do not hesitate to say that his book is the best treatise on New Testament theology hitherto produced in this country and reflects credit on the series of which it forms a part.