

Story of the New Testament

A Biblical Theology of the New Testament

The Church's Growth

As God's people, the Church take the good news of the gospel to the surrounding geographic areas and regions, local Churches start f all over the mediterranean. Different types of people speaking different languages in different cultures believe in Jesus' death and resurrection and start worshipping together weekly, sharing life and resources, praying, etc.

OUTLINE OF BIBLICAL HISTORY, NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES

As the gospel made inroads into again societies it encountered many philosophies and non-Christian ideas which challenged the apostolic message. The New Testament epistles show that the pressure to adopt pagan ideas that had existed for the people of God in the Old Testament times were also a constant threat to the Churches. the real danger to Christian teaching was not so much direct attacks upon it, but rather in the subtle distortion of Christian ideas. Among the troublemakers were Judaizers, who added Jewish law-keeping to the gospel. The Gnostics also undermined the gospel with elements of Greek philosophy and religion.¹

The apostle Paul's conversion and missionary work were integral to the expansion of the Church. After Paul had scattered the Jerusalem Church all over, he was converted and then ministered to the people he had sent throughout that area.

Paul's Missionary Journeys

Paul took three journeys to preach the gospel and expand the kingdom to the ends of the earth. Remember that we defined the kingdom as:

God's presence with God's people in God's place

But the kingdom was shifting in three primary ways.

- 1) God's presence shifts from Jesus *with God's people* to the Holy Spirit *in God's people*.
- 2) God's people shift from ethnic Israel to Samaritans to Gentiles.
- 3) God's place shifts from Jerusalem and the Temple to the people and the ends of the earth.

Again, we'll see through Paul's missionary journeys that God is taking the gospel, expanding His kingdom's borders, to the ends of the earth.

Paul's travel around the Mediterranean typically looked like one of two things. First, he planted Churches. He went into a region or city, preached the gospel, and then put Elders into place. Elders are those tasked with formal responsibility and leadership in the Church.

Second, he strengthened the Churches that he had already planted. First Timothy 3 says that Elders shouldn't be *recent converts*. They shouldn't be immature in their faith.

Yet, remember that at this time, there were no seasoned converts and the Churches needed shepherds so Paul appointed Elders. That being said, the Church leaders had almost no experience because there weren't Churches before that time.

¹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 218.

Chronology of Paul's adult life and death:²

Event	Probable Date
Conversion	34-35AD
Ministry in Damascus and Arabia	35-37
First Jerusalem Visit	37
Ministry in Tarsus and Cilicia	37-45
Famine-Relief Visit	45, 46, or 47
First Missionary Journey	46-47 or 47-48
Apostolic Council	48 or 49
Second Missionary Journey	48 or 49-51
Third Missionary Journey	52-57
Caesarean Imprisonment	57-59
Voyage to Rome	59-60
Roman Imprisonment	60-62
Ministry in the East	62-64
Death	64-65

So in a lot of his letters, we get Paul informing the Elders how to deal with gospel issues.

Paul's First Missionary Journey.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey.

Paul's Journey to Rome.

As Paul was moving around the Mediterranean area, the primary way he strengthened the Churches he had planted was by visiting them. The secondary way he strengthened them, corrected their doctrine, rebuked their hypocrisy, etc., was by writing them letters.

At this point in our study, we're going to look at how specific books draw out different biblical theological themes that run through the entire Bible.

Storylines

The arenas of life that we play, work, eat, sleep, and build relationships in form us more than we often know. A large part of *who we are* is bound up with how we belong to and relate with others in different contexts. Our identity goes deeper than what we think to the level of who we associate with and what we do.

As we come to believe in the gospel, our identity changes. Who we are is shaped less by what we've done, but by what God has done through Christ. These shifts are described through different scenic lenses, different arenas of life that help us grasp the beauty of God's redemption through Jesus' blood.

² Adapted from D.A. Carson, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 369.

The three arenas we are going to examine are: 1) the temple, 2) the courtroom, and 3) the home.

Our Holy God

God is holy. God's holiness means that God is separate or other. He is perfectly distinct from all other things. This is partly because He is uncreated and everything else is created. It is partly because He is perfect and everything else is stained by sin. God's holiness has a weightiness to it that burdens differently than the shackles of our sin.

In Genesis 1, Adam and Eve are with God, but they are not God. They are distinct and separate.

In Exodus 19, God promises that His people will be a holy people.

*5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”
(Ex 19:5-6)*

In Leviticus, God commands that His people will be *holy*.

Lev. 11:44 For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. 45 For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

Part of God's redemptive plan is to make a holy people. God is holy, therefore, His people shall be holy.

Isaiah 6 portrays our God in all his splendor and glory.

*Is. 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said:
“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”
(Isaiah 6:1-3)*

But not only God's people, everything within direct relationship to God was holy or was to be *sanctified* or *made holy*.

So when Moses met God at the burning bush, God said,

*“Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”
(Ex 3:5)*

Within the context of the Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting, there was a holy place that the sanctified priests could go and there was a most holy place where only the high priest could go. The high priest was to wear *holy garments* (Ex 28:2). Whatever touches the altar must be holy (Ex 29:37). Everything that went into the Tabernacle was made holy. Lampstands, tables, bread, priests ... everything. The word “holy” is used 124 times in Exodus and Leviticus alone.

Our God is holy and set apart. He is different than we are. His ways are not our ways (Isa 55). He is purely distinct from us even though we are his image-bearers. Holiness speaks to His moral perfection.

In the temple, God is holy and everything he touches is Holy.

Our Just God

God is also a God of justice and righteousness. His character is good. He is moral perfection. Not in the terms that we think of moral perfection. Our understanding of moral perfection is relative. This person is kinder than that. This person is ruder than that person. God is morally pure. In him there is no wrong. He walks the path of righteousness perfectly.

In Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve sinned, God judged them for their sin. They did evil, they acted unrighteously, and God acted righteously. He judged them for their sin. In the face of their unrighteousness, God was righteous.

In the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, God reveals His character and nature in the law. Within the law is a code of justice, a code of restitution and judgment for wrongs.

The oft quoted prophet Micah says instead of sacrifices and rituals, our God desires that we

8 *He has told you, O man, what is good;
 and what does the LORD require of you
 but to do justice, and to love kindness,
 and to walk humbly with your God?*
(Micah 6:8)

Our God is just. He makes right the wrongs and never errs. In the courtroom, He is a perfect judge.

Our Loving God

Our God is like a loving Father. As our creator, His love for us is unique in that we came from him. Most parents will admit that their love for their spouse is different than their love for anyone else. And yet, their love for children is unique as well. Spousal love is volitional. It is based on choices and the will. Parental love is ontological. It is based off of being and createdness. Because our children come from us, we love them differently. Not more or better necessarily, but differently.

So in Genesis 3, when God exiles Adam and Eve, He's not just exiling people, to some degree, He's exiling children.

In Genesis 12-15, when God called Abraham out of Ur and into a relationship with Him, He told Abraham that He would create through him a new family as large as the stars in the sky and the sand on the shore.

In Exodus 4, God calls His people Israel "my firstborn son."

Ex. 4:22 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'

Again in Hosea, God calls His covenant people His child.

*Hos. 11:1 When Israel was a child, I loved him,
 and out of Egypt I called my son.*

In 2 Samuel 7, David has the epiphany to build God a house. David is living in a luxurious palace and God is still dwelling in a dusty old tent. But God rejects David's hope by saying He will build for David a house.

13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”
(2 Samuel 7:13-16)

There’s a pun in the original language. David desires to build God a house or temple, but God is going to build David a house, meaning a lineage or a family line.

So we’ve seen these three images or context for understanding the context of God’s nature: the temple, the courtroom, the family.

Our God is a loving father creating a family.

Story

Within the context of God building a people for Himself, there are a few aspects of believing the gospel that helps us understand just what it means to be in the people of God.

God’s people are sanctified. Frequently in the New Testament, God’s people are referred to as “the saints,” which is just another way of saying “sanctified ones.” This doesn’t mean “perfect people,” but people who have been sanctified. Like the shovel for the altar, we have been made holy. For example, in 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses a really messed up Church as

the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:
(1 Corinthians 1:2)

right before he tells them about their mass idolatry and sin issues. Paul is perfectly comfortable calling them sanctified ones even though they still struggle with sin.

Upon our salvation, our merciful and gracious God *sanctifies us*.

God’s people are justified. Justification means that God has declared unrighteous sinners righteous. In the courtroom of life, the Judge on the throne has declared proven criminals to be guilt-free in the court of law.

Rom. 3:21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
(Rom 3:21-26)

God’s righteousness is now for those who believe in Jesus. Those who have faith are those who will be declared righteous.

*“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” 4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,
(Rom 4:3-5)*

Abraham’s faith or belief is what led to his righteousness or his justification. It is not based on our merit, but our faith. And it is not based on the amount of our faith, but the one in whom we believe, “the just and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (3:26).

God’s people are adopted. We were once “children of wrath” and “sons of disobedience” (Eph 2). Adam and Eve’s sin removed us from God’s family, but God’s rescue plan is moving us back into His family of faith.

Matthew opens his gospel narrative with a genealogy of Jesus, showing that our King comes from the line of David and the line of Abraham (Matt 1). So Jesus is part of that family that God promised in Genesis 12.

Luke’s genealogy goes all the way back to Adam and Eve and then ends with...

*the son of Adam, the son of God.
(Luke 3:38)*

Seventeen times in the Gospels and Acts, Jesus is called the Son of God (Matt 4:3, 6; 8:29; 14:33; 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54; Mark 1:1; 3:11; 15:39; Luke 1:35; 3:38; 4:3, 9, 41; 22:70). Jesus is the Son of God incarnate.

But now, we are sons of daughters of God.

*Gal. 4:1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. 3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.
(Gal 4:1-7)*

We are no longer bound to our sin and slavery. We are no longer sons and daughters of disobedience, but are now adopted into a new family. We are now sons and daughters of our God. We are reconciled and brought back into relationship with the God who created us.

We are now heirs to the promises and life of the Father. We partake of His fatherly love. We enjoy the blessings of being siblings with the Son. We are part of a family.

Our Story

Because we are justified, there is now no condemnation. For those who believe, we can know that our need to be righteous has been met. We have been declared righteous and there is no condemnation.

Rom. 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

We have no need to fear the wrath of God, for He has taken the penalty of our sin upon Himself and declared us to be righteous.

Sometimes the courtroom drama is described as God coming down off the bench and taking the place of the accused. And while this is partially true, it is only partially true, because in the true courtroom scene, God is both the Judge and the most offended party. He is both the judge and the plaintiff.

Many of us struggle with guilt. We feel the weight of things we've done in the past. We feel the burden of sinful habits that creep back into the fabric of life unannounced. A shadow of guilt leads to a storm of doubt because we can't shake the fact that our past or our present might define our future. But in our justification, every ounce of guilt, every shred of evidence against our character and deeds has been deemed unnecessary because the Judge has declared us innocent.

In the courtroom of life, we have no need to worry about our standing before God because He has declared from time past to eternity future, "You are righteous."

Because we are sanctified, we can now act like it. Paul often roots our growth in grace in the grace that's been bestowed upon us in the gospel. When we believe the gospel, we are washed clean of our sin and guilt and sanctified.

Many of us struggle to do good. Doing the right thing isn't always easy. Frequently we do the right thing out of self-interest more than a desire to be holy. But because of the gospel, we can know that we are holy, and therefore desire to live holy and acceptable lives before a holy and righteous God.

Paul can tell a group of people struggling with sin that they have been sanctified. They have been made holy. Frequently Paul will use definitive sanctification to motivate ongoing growth in grace or progressive sanctification. Paul will say, you're a Christian, now act like it. You're a saint, now act like it. You've been justified, now act like it.

Paul also tells us that holiness or *being sanctified* is God's will for us. When people ask the question, "What is God's will for me?" The biblical answer is...

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.
(1 Thess 4:3-8)

David Peterson says,

If we are definitively sanctified by the work of Christ and the gift of His Spirit, 'growth' in holiness will mean increasing and abounding in practical expressions of that status, calling and commitment which is already ours by God's grace.³

Our motivation for holy living is now rooted in the fact that we've been made holy. Everyone is growing in grace, but only to the degree that we understand, appreciate, look back to our being sanctified in Christ in salvation.

³ David Peterson, , 136.

Because you've been adopted, God loves you as He loves Jesus. Now that you've believed the gospel, the love God has for you is the same love He has for His son. Because of the gospel, you've been united to Christ through faith. And because of your faith and union with Christ, the love the Father has for the Son is the love He has for you.

Many of us struggle with our parents or our family. Whether we grew up with bad parents or siblings; whether divorce or adultery broke what two people covenanted to keep together, many of us would say that our families are a source of pain. Many of us have daddy issues or mommy issues or both. Whether our father never told us that he loves us or our mother always expected us to be perfect, we struggled to please them, we struggled to make them happy.

But in the gospel, you are loved by your Father. Because of Jesus' work on the cross, the Creator of all things, including you can say to you, "You are my beloved son or daughter, with whom I am well-pleased."

Summary. Friends, this is good news. You have been justified in Christ, for now there is no guilt or condemnation. You have been sanctified in Christ, for now you are holy and can live holy lives. You have been adopted into God's eternal family, for now you are loved with an eternal love that will never end.

Storylines

Different people would define the reason for our estrangement from God differently. Ultimately our need for reconciliation comes from a rebellious heart that sins against God.

The Bible sees sin and idolatry at the root of our exile from God. Our reconciliation brings with it the need to identify and denounce the pseudo gods we exalt on the throne of our hearts.

In Genesis 3, sin is disbelieving God by disobeying His Word. Adam and Eve had one prohibition and two commands. Don't eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Bear fruit and multiply. Keep and cultivate the garden. That was their blessing. But they disobeyed their Creator's word. They didn't believe in His goodness. They didn't believe that what He said, he meant. They failed to believe that He would do what He said He'd do. So they disobeyed His Word.

In Genesis 4, Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve's sons offer their oblation to God. Cain is jealous of Abel's offering and murders his brother. Sin has a generational element. Though Cain is totally culpable for his own sin, Adam and Eve's sin in some way affected the result between even their own sons.

In Exodus 20, the first two commandments of the Ten commandments have to do with idolatry. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself any carved images and worship them. One way of looking at our sin is through the lens of *idolatry*. Fill in the blank. "If I didn't have _____, life would be meaningless." Whatever is at the center of our contentment and purpose, whatever drives our thoughts and behavior is typically a functional god known as an idol. Idols are often good things made ultimate. Their power is in their subtle nature to slowly consume more and more of our hearts.

Therefore, sin can be defined as transgressing God's law. But it can also be defined as worshipping a false-god, a pseudo-god, a lesser-than-God-god.

In Joshua 7, Achan disobeys God's command and it affects the whole congregation of Israel. He kept for himself some of the plunder from Ai, when God's people were to destroy everything. One man's sin affects the whole body's life.

In Psalm 51, David says, "against you and you alone have I sinned." In one sense, all sin is against God. And in all sin, God is the most offended party because He never sins. Sin is antithetical to His person. Sin is outside of Him.

And yet, in another sense, David's sin is against almost everyone who is even remotely connected to him. In David's sin against Bathsheba, the sin he's confessing here, he has obviously sinned against Bathsheba and his own wife, Michal. He obviously also sinned against his children as their father, sleeping with another woman. He had Bathsheba's husband murdered in order to legitimize their bastard child. So David sinned against Uriah. David had Uriah killed by wielding his power with the military in a way that most likely put many soldiers in harms way. So David sinned against his own military. As the king, David was tasked with modeling holiness and righteousness for his subjects. He failed and therefore sinned against God's people. The irony of this Psalm is that there's almost no one whom David didn't sin against. Sin affects everyone in your life. There is no such thing as a private sin.

In the book of Hosea, God tells the prophet Hosea to marry an unlikely candidate, a woman named Gomer promised to cheat on Hosea. The book is helping God's people understand that God in His infinite goodness and sovereignty took a bride He knew would cheat on Him over and over and over again. And while we would have children with our false gods, our King would still love us with a "never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love."⁴ He will adopt our children and show us kindness we don't deserve. *Sin is like spiritual adultery.*

In Isaiah 44, the prophet communicates the utter stupidity of worshipping something that cannot ultimately satisfy our need for purpose or contentment. He uses the illustration of how a person takes a piece of wood and cuts it in half. With one half he fashions an idol, a pseudo-god to worship and bow down to and make sacrifices to. With the other half he uses to light his fire and cook his dinner. While we don't create little carved images of gods to worship, we are quick to serve something of our own creation.

Story

In Romans 1-3, Paul gives a tour de force of sin and its deceptive power. Some highlights:

- Sin leads to "suppressing the truth" (1:18).
- Rebellion leads to a hardened heart (1:24).
- Sin can be defined as exchanging the truth for a lie, serving the creature instead of the Creator (1:25).
- Sin clouds our discernment (1:32).
- Sin breeds hypocrisy (2:1ff).
- God's response to sin is wrath (2:5).
- Sin is an equal opportunity offender; it affects all people (3:9).
- Sin is a universal human problem (3:23).

Sin contaminates every aspect of our being, every part of our person, every faculty and emotion and thought and deed. That's not to say that we're as evil as we *could* be, but that sin is pervasive in its reach in our lives. But in the gospel, Christ came to cure our sin problem and replace the rightful king to the throne of our hearts.

Hebrews 10:1-18 draws out the implications that the basis of continual sacrifices each year for the sins of God's people logically imply that they are ineffective. However, Jesus Christ died, once for all. No more sacrifices needed, for the true paschal lamb has been slain. No more ritual killings, for the scapegoat has been slaughtered.

In the book of Revelation, there is One seated on the throne who is both the Lion and Lamb. The picture of the lamb is of a slaughtered and bleeding lamb. One who has been sacrificed. Yet He is seated on the throne where everyone lays down their crowns and worships him.

Jesus has come to reconcile us to God, to save us from our sin, to replace our worthless idols with the king of Kings and the Lord of lords (Rev 19:16).

⁴ Sally Lloyd Jones, The Jesus Storybook Bible.

Our Story

Sin is deceptive, therefore, we must beware of its power. Hebrews 3 talks about the deceitfulness of sin. Sin is inherently tied to lies. And we love to believe lies. We tell ourselves lies. We tell others lies. We listen to the lies of our culture, our city, our neighbor, our spouse, our parents, our children, etc. We are used-lie salesman, peddling our half-truths and deception to anyone and everyone we can find. But most notably, we sell ourselves lies. And nobody buys our lies more than we do. We must cling to truth as we repent of our sin and identify the lies we tend to purchase at the expense of our lives.

Sin affects everyone. There is no such thing as a private sin. You might think what you do in the dark doesn't hurt anyone, but it most certainly does. Sin's radius is far greater than we can know or can see. Therefore, one of the most significant lies we must deny is that "it's not hurting anyone," because it is.

Our sin has been definitively dealt with. On the cross, Jesus killed death and sin and its power. Though sin still has power this side of heaven, it has been dealt a mortal blow from which it won't recover.

Heb. 9:26 for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.