New Testament Christology

• Method
• NT Eschatology
• Titles of Christ
• Christology of Jesus
• Pre-Pauline Christology
• Christology in the Gospels
• Christology of Paul
• Christology of Hebrews

Method

• Effect of preunderstandings (R. Brown)
  – Start with what we think it means to be human or
divine and fit Jesus into that.
  – “…most Christians tolerate only as much
  humanity as they deem consonant with their view
  of the divinity…”
  – Clusters around significant events in Jesus’ life.

Method

• Unity and diversity in NT Christology
  – Different Christologies in the NT.
  – James Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the NT*: unity
  consists in the common conviction that “in and
  through Jesus something decisive for human
  salvation occurred.”
  – Ben Witherington, *The Many Faces of the Christ*:
  the unity is a common narrative of what God has
done in Christ.
NT Eschatology

• OT saw history divided into two ages, separated by the Day of the Lord.

  This age
  Day of the Lord

  The age to come

NT Eschatology

• Kingdom of God = reign of God; the new reality of the age to come.

  This age
  Day of the Lord

  Kingdom of God

  The age to come

NT Eschatology

• Jesus is the pivot point of history.
• The kingdom of God broke into history in Jesus’ ministry.

  This age
  Jesus

  Kingdom of God

  The age to come
NT Eschatology

- Jesus’ resurrection marked the inauguration of the kingdom.
- His parousia will bring the kingdom in its fullness.

\[\text{This age} \quad \text{Resurrection} \quad \text{Parousia} \]

\[\text{The age to come} \quad \text{Kingdom of God} \]

NT Eschatology

- We live “between the times.”
- The kingdom is “already” and “not yet.”
- We live by the principles of the kingdom now.

\[\text{This age} \quad \text{Resurrection} \quad \text{Parousia} \]

\[\text{The age to come} \quad \text{Already} \quad \text{Not yet} \]

Titles of Christ

- Christ or Messiah
  - Jesus accepted this title from others.
  - He reinterpreted it in terms of the Son of Man.
  - The “Messianic Secret” (W. Wrede).
- Son of God
  - Royal messianic figure, not necessarily divine.
  - Unique knowledge of and intimacy with God.
Titles of Christ

- Jesus called himself the Son of Man.
  - Doesn’t necessarily mean Jesus’ humanity.
  - Three categories of sayings: present ministry, suffering and death, coming in glory (Dan. 7).
  - Jesus may have developed suffering aspect from Servant Songs in Isaiah.
  - Jesus saw his mission as Messiah in terms of the Son of Man.

- Lord
  - Sir, Master, Lord, God. Lord over what?
  - More appropriate after Jesus’ exaltation.

- Savior
  - Used 17 times of Jesus in the NT.
  - Much less common than “Lord.”

- God
  - Used very sparingly of Jesus.
  - All of these are contested.

Titles of Christ

- Jesus as divine wisdom incarnate.
  - See Pr. 3:19-20; 8:22-36; Baruch; Sirach; Wisdom of Solomon.
  - Wisdom as preexistent divine agent through whom God created the world.
  - Wisdom comes to earth for human salvation.
  - Jesus taught in wisdom speech (parables).
  - See Mk. 6:2; Mt. 12:42; Col. 2:2-3; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Mt. 11:19.
Christology of Jesus

• The Christology of Jesus
  – Book by Ben Witherington III.
  – Jesus’ self-consciousness or self-understanding.
  – Indirect evidence for his identity.
• Why look at this?
  – Link between Jesus and early church.
  – Does the church’s high Christology go directly back to Jesus himself?
  – Does it draw out implications of Jesus’ ministry?
  – Did the church invent it?

Christology of Jesus

• Jesus’ relationships
  – John the Baptist: the Coming One; more than the last of the prophets.
  – The Pharisees: a different view of holiness.
  – The disciples: calling the eschatological community of Israel.

Christology of Jesus

• Jesus’ experiences and deeds
  – Exalted view of his own authority.
  – Activities with messianic associations.
  – Crucified as king of the Jews.
  – Visionary experiences confirmed his Sonship.
  – Exorcisms and healings: Solomonic or messianic figure.
  – Acted as God’s agent.
Pre-Pauline Christology

• Prayers and confessions (some in Aramaic)
  – Maranatha. Abba.
  – “Jesus is Lord.”
• Christological hymns:  V-pattern.
  – Shows “Christological monotheism” (Wright).
  – “Binitarianism” (L. Hurtado).
• Q material:  kingdom of God, Jesus as wisdom and Son of Man.
• Christological use of the OT.

Christology in the Gospels

• Mark
  – Jesus as Son of God, suffering Son of Man.
• Matthew
  – Jesus as new Moses, teacher, messiah of Israel.
  – Jesus as fulfillment of OT, as Immanuel.
• Luke
  – Jesus as friend of sinners, as universal savior.
  – Jesus’ prayer life; the ascension.
• John:  Jesus as Word, Son, God’s agent.

Christology of Paul

• Being “in Christ.”
  – See handout.
  – A real spiritual union with Christ.
• Jesus as the Last Adam.
  – Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15.
  – Parallels between Adam and Christ.
• Other characteristic passages
  – Romans 3:21-22a; 1 Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 5:14-21; Phil. 2:9-11.
Christology of Hebrews

- Most common title: Jesus as Son.
- Distinctive title: Jesus as high priest.
- Also: prodromos (forerunner), archegos (champion, pioneer), example, apostle.
- Covers whole career of Jesus.
  - Preexistence through ministry
  - Death and resurrection
  - Exaltation, heavenly session
  - Return

Christology of Hebrews

- Interdependence of humanity and divinity.
  - Explicit declarations of divinity.
  - Necessity of his humanity.
  - Reality of his temptation.
  - High priest is both divine and human.
  - Made perfect in suffering.

Christology of Hebrews

- The work of Christ in Hebrews
  - Once-for-all sacrifice.
  - Defeated Satan and released his captives.
  - Initiated perfect and permanent covenant.
  - Present work of intercession.