

New Testament Theology
Henry C. Sheldon
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Prof. Sheldon's book bears evidence on almost every page of thorough acquaintance with the subject and of quite unusual skill in presenting its matter to the best advantage. The field of New Testament Theology is a large one in itself and the intensified discussion of its many intricate problems during the last decades has vastly extended it. Yet in 364 pages the author succeeds in giving a fairly adequate, if not exhaustive, survey of its entire compass. No important phase of teaching or problem is passed by without at least some suggestive and illuminating reference. The condensation is even greater than the size of the volume indicates, for out of 364 no less than 76 pages are devoted to introductory discussion of the literary provenience of the sources. But the compression is not secured at the expense of thoroughness. Of the sketchy, superficial character which is apt to belong to small handbooks of theological science there is not a trace. To be sure the author has had to sacrifice, in order to secure this reduced compass, on the one hand all detailed exegetical discussion, on the other hand all but the most meager reference to the literature. The naming of scholars prominently identified with certain problems or theories is avoided even where the text plainly shows that some well-known name was in the author's mind. Still another thing that is perhaps connected with the compactness of the book consists in what might be called its anatomical character. It analyzes and summarizes the doctrinal content of each source and does this admirably. But it scarcely ventures beyond this to describe the development of New Testament truth as a living organism, or to raise genetic questions. E.g., while attention is duly called to Paul's peculiar doctrine of the Spirit as the substratum of the entire Christian life, the problem how this peculiar Pauline advance upon the previously attained position is to be explained is not discussed. It is only fair, however, to remember that the incorporation of these other, more abstruse, matters might have easily interfered with the positive and straightforward presentation which forms one of the main attractions of the book. While in the sphere of anatomy the student deals largely with assured facts, in that of biology nearly everything is problematic and hypothetical. The origins and connections in the history of revelation are highly mysterious.

There are, of course, individual points wherein other students of the subject might take issue with the writer's conclusions. Thus is the treatment of the Pauline antithesis of "flesh" and "Spirit"; we believe that it is a mistake to choose one's point of departure in the psychological conception of "spirit". The contrast is not between the predominance of one part or element in man and that of another part or element but between the natural and the supernatural. With the psychological use of *pneuma*, also found in Paul, this has little to do. On p. 238 a few words might have been devoted to the modern Ritschlian conception of "the righteousness of God" as a gracious principle, especially in connection with Rom. 3:21 ff. Exception also must be taken to the summary way in which the author disposes of the predestinarian element in the Pauline and Johannine teaching, principally on the ground that it is irreconcilable with the obvious universalism of their presentation of the Gospel as a whole, and that therefore the apparently absolute predestinarian statements must be explained as oratorical effusions not meant to be expressive of any fixed theory. It is entirely overlooked that both in Paul and John the principle of predestination is turned to the eminently practical account of furnishing the basis of the believers assurance. Why is the one passage 1 Cor 2:27 quoted to prove the possibility to Paul's mind of his own falling from grace, whilst all the numerous passages, which

voice his absolute assurance of salvation are passed by in silence? But it were too much to expect from Prof. Sheldon an adequate exhibition of the predestinarian strand in New Testament teaching even as a matter of purely historical interest. Let us congratulate ourselves that in regard to the other, more common and fundamental issues, which the Church has at stake in the interpretation of the New Testament, such as the supernaturalism of religion and revelation, the deity of Christ, the vicarious character of the atonement, the supremacy of grace in salvation, the author throws the weight of his opinion unqualifiedly on the side of the old historic faith. While undogmatic in its methods, the book is essentially an orthodox book in its results. It proves that the Evangelical Protestant doctrine is in a large sense the faithful reproduction of New Testament teaching.