

ACTS AND ROMANS (NT5250)

Syllabus

I. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION

The goal of this course is to better understand the authorial purpose, historical context, and contemporary relevance of the book of Acts and the book of Romans.

We will pursue this goal by looking at each of these books as separate entities, as is proper since there is no obvious connection between the two. However, we will also have occasion to note an unanticipated connection between them. The significance of, and theology behind, the Gentile mission is a common concern for both books, as is the redemptive-historical continuity of God's overarching Old/New plan for his people. The two books nicely coordinate and offer correlative perspectives on pivotal events in the early Church, and both flow from a common theological concern.

At the same time, they are very different. Acts, so grounded in historical events, can seem too "occasional" for modern readers and the modern church—how is what happened then relevant to us? Should we seek to model our churches after the ancient pattern, or should we do what we think is best for our own culture and times? By contrast, Romans seems so abstract and theological—a treatise that is always applicable in all ages—that relevance is often regarded as a much simpler matter. But what was the situation that called forth this letter, and what was Paul's purpose in writing it? The particularity of Acts and the generality of Romans both present challenges to modern readers, and it will be part of the goal of this class to explore those challenges and make some suggestions for moving forward.

The goal of all of this is to serve God's church. That is why these books were given to us, and that is how we should read them—as pastors and servants of God who seek to build up God's people, the Jew first, and also the Greek.

B. DATES AND TIMES

Video lectures will be provided for this course and available on the course website.

Additionally we will meet synchronously through scheduled Zoom meetings from 10-12 on the following days:

- Monday – Friday, June 8-12.
- Monday – Wednesday, June 15-16.

All assignments are due on July 24th (three weeks after the close of the term).

C. INSTRUCTOR

Thomas Keene

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II. REQUIRED READING

The following readings are required, and are a graded portion of the class. At the end of the term you will fill out a "reading completion form," stating on-your-honor the percentage of each reading that you completed. Partial credit will *not* be given for article-length readings.

Many of the readings are article or chapter length, and will be provided to you (no need to purchase). I have used a star (*) to indicate books (or articles in books) that I recommend purchasing (they will not be provided online).

Note: These readings are not being assigned to give you “the right answers” but rather to call you to engage in an ongoing dialog with Scripture and with those who interpret the Scriptures. Please read with humility and “critical appreciation.”

It is a good idea to get ahead in your readings. Those wanting to do so should start with the Bible reading, followed by the Special Introduction reading. Everyone should finish the Bible reading as soon as possible, as it will help you better engage the lecture material. It is best to stay just ahead of the lecture material in the readings.

A. BIBLE READING

Read (or listen to) each book in a single sitting, preferably from a Reader’s Bible (<https://www.crossway.org/bibles/esv-readers-bible-cob/>). (Note: one of the discussion questions will ask you to summarize the books).

Read through each book a second time, this time making a list of as many distinct textual and exegetical questions you can think of. You will “turn this in” as part of the discussion forums. (For purposes of this assignment, aim for a **minimum** of 5-10 questions per “chapter”).

B. PRIMARY SOURCES

Several of the discussions threads will require you to read short selections of material from primary sources dating to the first generation of the church (ie, backgrounds for our books). You will need to read through the source in question before engaging the discussion. Your goal is to read them critically but appreciatively.

C. SPECIAL INTRODUCTION

*Kruger, Michael J., ed. *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2016. The chapters on Acts and, well, Romans.

Optional: Dunn, J. D. G. “Romans, Letter to The.” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downer’s Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, n.d. Pages 838-850.

D. ACTS

Gaffin, Richard B., Jr. *Perspectives on Pentecost*. Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1979.

*Johnson, D. E. *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*. Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 1997.

E. ROMANS

Bird, M. F. “‘Raised for Our Justification’: A Fresh Look at Romans 4:25.” *Colloquium* 35, no. 1 (2003): 31–46.

Ridderbos, H. N. *When the Time Had Fully Come: Studies in New Testament Theology*. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2001. Pages 44-60.

----- “Professor Ridderbos on Romans 11:25-32.” In *Israel*, translated by R. B. Gaffin. Available online only.

Westerholm, S. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. Pages 261-296.

Wright, N. T. *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991. Pages 18-40, 231-257.

III. ASSESSMENT

Your final grade will be determined by three factors: (1) your completion of the required reading, (2) a 10-15 exegetical paper on a text of your choosing, (3) a three-question final exam.

A. BIBLE READING (8%)

B. GENERAL READING (7%)

On the day you take the final exam you will also be required to fill out a form stating the percentage of reading that you completed. Each of your required reading assignments will be listed and you will be required to estimate, on your honor, the percentage of each you completed. I consider a book “read” if you have made every effort to understand its main points and the various justifications offered for that point. This usually requires reading and comprehending each paragraph, but not necessarily each word or sentence. In short: skimming is permissible at certain points and in certain cases, but not skipping.

Partial credit will NOT be given for the Bible Reading assignments or for article/chapter length material.

C. DISCUSSION (20%)

You are expected to participate in the online forums. You will need to post to each of the 15 professor-to-student topics. You will also need to respond in the student-to-student topics at least 5 times. For purposes of the “discussion” grade, participation is pass/fail, but note that *some* of the discussion prompts are also graded for “quality” (see below under “position papers.”)

D. PAPER (40%)

1. OVERVIEW

You are required to write a 10-15 (double-spaced) page exegetical research paper on a text of your choosing. You can choose any text in Romans or Acts. The paper should be submitted by email no later than midnight on the due date listed above.

What follows is some guidance in writing an exegetical paper. For a more thorough and general discussion of seminary paper writing, begin with Part 1 of my paper writing guide online:

<http://www.signandshadow.com/2017/11/02/how-to-write-a-seminary-paper-part-1-the-thesis/>

2. TEXT SELECTION

Text selection can make or break an exegetical paper, so choose your text carefully. Your text needs to be short enough that you can do it justice in the space of 10-15 pages, but long enough that it can stand on its own and has its own integrity. Aim for about a paragraph, maybe two if necessary. It is not always easy to determine where your paragraph begins and ends—different English translations and Biblical commentaries divide the text differently (there are no paragraphs in the “original,” at least not as we might consider them), so you will need to do a little research before coming to a final decision. I suggest you pick a section of Scripture (a verse or two) that seems interesting to you, then do a little research on those verses to determine the beginning and ending of the paragraph in which they occur. That final paragraph (or two) should be the center-point of your paper.

3. HOW TO WRITE AN EXEGETICAL PAPER

An exegetical paper, unlike a theological or thematic one, is centered upon one particular pericope of Scripture (a paragraph or two, depending on genre). That text is the heart of your paper, and your goal should be to explain what that text means in both its immediate and canonical context.

Once you have picked a text that interests you (see above), begin your research by reading your text (and its surrounding context) over and over again. Go verse by verse and ask yourself tons of questions (and write them all down). No question is too simple (or too complex)! Sometimes the key to a text is found in the questions that seem “too obvious.” Make sure at least one of these questions is “What is the point?” In fact, several of your questions should be variations on that all-important idea. Why does

Peter say it that way? Why does John include this in his argument? Why does the author of Hebrews go there? These are all purpose questions, and they are the most important ones to ask.

Now start answering your questions. Don't pick up a book or a commentary quite yet. Answer your questions first by prayerfully and humbly looking at the text itself. You will need to look at the immediate context of your passage. How does it fit into the flow of the book as a whole? How does it further the author's main point? Outline your text, and outline the book in which it occurs. These types of activities help you view the text as a small piece of a larger whole.

Once you have started to explore your text a little more a "main point" should begin to coalesce in your mind. Try to write down that main point in a sentence or so. Aim for a "tweetable" main point. Then broaden your horizons. What is the main point of this section of the book? What is the main point of the book as a whole? And how does this book contribute to our overall understanding of the canon, of redemptive history, and of the Christian life?

Only after you have at least preliminary answers to these questions are you ready to crack open a commentary. Start researching your passage in reliable commentaries and articles (the Word series of commentaries usually have excellent bibliographies you can consult). In the course of your research you will be able to refine and develop (or reject) the ideas you have already come to on your own.

Now it's time to start writing. Sketch up a preliminary outline. Your organization will of course be dependent on your passage and the main point you want to make, but I suggest you start narrow (that is, with the details of your text) and work your way out (that is, with the literary and then canonical context of your text). After a brief introduction, start by explaining the immediate concerns of the text you picked. Are there any translation issues to note? Any strange words? Describe the flow of the argument and tell us the main point being made. Next, describe how your passage fits into the broader context of the book—start with the immediate context and then increasingly "zoom out" until the whole book is in view. As a final concern, show how your passage deepens our understanding of the Bible as a whole, how it fits into the Gospel of our redemption (this is not the major emphasis of an exegetical paper, but it's good to do). Along the way, or at the end, you can feel more than free to make some "practical applications."

4. GREEK REQUIREMENT

If you have taken Greek please use it in your paper. Provide your own translation of the passage that you picked and justify that translation when appropriate. Use Greek when appropriate throughout. You do not need to be detailed here, but if you know Greek use it!

5. FORMAT

Your paper should be double spaced with 1-inch margins. Use Times New Roman or equivalent font, 12pt. Cite all your sources following the guidelines laid out in the SBL Handbook. or the Chicago Manual of Style (I'm fine with either the "standard" method or the newer author-date format) You might want to considering using bibliography software, such as the free Zotero plugin for Firefox (<http://nerdlets.org/2008/11/20/setting-up-zotero-link-by-link/>) to make this process easier. Include a bibliography with all the works you cited in your paper as described in the aforementioned guides.

E. POSITION PAPERS ("FINAL EXAM") (25%)

There will not be a traditional final exam for this class. Instead you will be given the opportunity to respond to a series of technical or controversial matters related to this section of the canon. The prompts will require substantive 1-3 page answers, each of which should follow all of the ordinary expectations of academic paper writing (but these are not research papers). The intent is to give you an opportunity to carefully work through some of the knotty problems we will encounter along the way

and critically engage the issues in an effort to reach a degree of “cognitive rest.” In essence these are position papers in which you provide an argument for your solution to critical and theological challenges posed by this section of the canon.

You can approach this assignment as an “open note, open book, take home exam,” though, as mentioned above, it should be formatted like an academic paper. Good answers will reflect an integration and appropriation of material derived from lectures, course readings, primary sources, and personal reflection and critique. Great answers will additionally utilize independent research, and to that end a Bibliography of helpful resources will be provided for each topic above. The use of independent research is not required, but it will assist you in working through the issues.

The prompts will be posted in the discussion forums, as will your responses. Other students will not be able to see your response until after they have posted.

F. GRADING SCALE

97-100	A+	87-89	B+	Etc.
93-96	A	83-86	B	<60 F
90-92	A-	80-82	B-	

IV. OUTLINE AND FURTHER READING

An outline of lecture material will be provided on the first day of class to assist you in studying. I will also provide slides of my lecture material as we proceed in class. An extended bibliography will also be provided.