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, though much of the time we will find a great deal of unity 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 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.

We will meet from 8:30 – 5:30 on January 28th-30th at the Tysons campus.

All graded materials (paper, take-home final exam, reading) are due Friday March 15th. See below for some suggestions on completing these requirements.

C. INSTRUCTOR

Thomas Keene
email: keenetommy@gmail.com (this is the fastest way to reach me)
Phone: 215-346-6717

D. COURSE WEBSITE

You can find all course documents and some of the readings online. The URL will be provided the first day of class, or can be requested by email.
II. REQUIRED READING

The following readings are required, and are a graded portion of the class. You will be required to fill out a “reading completion form,” stating on-your-honor the percentage of each reading that you completed. I suggest you complete all the reading before completing the final exam.

While all the items on this list are required, most are short articles in journals or a chapter in a book, and therefore need not be purchased (a reading packet will be made available). I have used a star (*) to indicate books (or articles in books) that I recommend purchasing (they will not be in the reading packet).

A. BIBLE READING. Read Acts and Romans at least once.

B. SPECIAL INTRODUCTION


C. ACTS


D. ROMANS


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


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. Reading (20%)

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.

B. 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.

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.

C. **Final (40%)**

The final exam will be posted online on the last day of class. It will consist of three essay questions. The first question will be a “special introduction” question over one of the books we have covered. Some examples include “What is the purpose or purposes of the letter to the Romans?” or “Explain how the genre of Acts helps modern interpreters interpret the book?” The second question will be more thematic and theological in orientation. For example, “Discuss the nature of righteousness in Romans.” The last question will be a practical one; for example, “What are some of the challenges for applying Acts to the modern church?” For each
question you should be able to critically interact with both the readings and lectures while simultaneously demonstrating your understanding of the actual book.

You will need to complete the exam by the due date listed above. You may download the exam at any time but please do not look at it until you are ready to complete the exam in one 3-hour sitting. Include your name, email address, and your start and completion times on the exam.

You may use an unannotated English or Greek bible during the exam, but no other helps are permitted.

D. Recommendations for Completing Assignments
All of your assignments are due on the same day. I would recommend, however, that you impose a schedule on yourself so you are not rushing to complete everything at once.

I recommend that you begin reading as soon as possible, and continue reading throughout the weeks that follow, with a goal of completing the reading the day before you take the final exam.

Your priority should be on the exegetical paper as it is the most time-consuming, and is also the most difficult of your assignments. A great exegetical paper covers over a lot of academic “sins.”

The exam is designed to be B-able if you have diligently and critically engaged with the lectures and readings. If you have completed (and understood) the readings, and have been correspondingly engaged during class time, then you should be able to get a B on the exam.

Further reviewing your notes, memorizing important dates and people, and being able to critically assess the significance of various ideas and approaches to these writings will serve to increase your grade. In other words, your grade on the exam is more a function of critical engagement than cramming.

E. Grading Scale

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<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>97-100</td>
<td>A+</td>
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<tr>
<td>93-96</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<td>83-86</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>&lt;60</td>
<td>F</td>
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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.

V. Schedule
A detailed outline will be provided on the first day of class, but you can expect us to proceed roughly as follows:

• Monday: Introduction, Acts
• Tuesday: Acts, Romans
• Wednesday: Romans, Conclusion.