

**NT 503 Reading the New Testament**  
**Take-Home Final Exam**  
**Revised 8/12/2020**  
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This exam is designed to be a learning experience that helps you pull together the key components of our course, especially as it will relate to your ministry contexts. From this point on, you will be able to refer to your textbooks or commentaries for the content necessary in sermon preparation and teaching. Our focus is on how you integrate this content into your ministries.

You may use your books and notes. Try and enjoy the challenge and the opportunity to pull the course together.

**A couple of observations:**

1. **Historical-critical studies** help us to reconstruct the message as the original audience would likely have understood it. Contemporary analogies must grow out of a clear understanding of what the message meant, then allow the Spirit to guide us into what the message says now. It is our responsibility based on the call of God to do the hard work of using the best of the methods that are available to us. Every method is designed to ask only certain questions. For example, **textual critical** methods focus on the manuscript evidence in the attempt to reconstruct the most likely original words of the author. **Source critical** methods focus on the sources of information such as written documents (possibly the LXX or Hebrew OT, other synoptic gospels, sayings sources that were written down, etc.) or oral tradition (eyewitness accounts circulating among the churches). Each method has strengths and blind spots. No one method can faithfully address all the issues that arise in our text, especially since we are several millennia removed from the Christ event. The **best scholarship/interpretation** knows how to build on what is solid, even if it challenges our own position in conjunction with the Spirit. The **worst scholarship/interpretation** wants to destroy every other position but its own.
2. Having 4 different perspectives on the impact of Jesus in the lives of those first disciples who knew him (the Gospels are all based on eye-witness accounts) lends credibility to the Church's proclamation of the Gospel. There is only one Gospel and it originates with God, not the Church. The four perspectives show how the Gospel addresses the needs and deepening insights of people in ever-changing historical-critical contexts with the same Christ. **Important Note:** Society has a love-hate relationship with Jesus which goes in cycles. One of the most difficult challenges is the spirit of the age which tends to make Jesus into our own image. The simplest example of this comes in a quote I read several years ago: "We know we have created God in our own image when He hates all the same people we do." There are all kinds of reasons why this is so, and you will need

to be alert to that tendency. Just remember, the Scripture is both a word of challenge as well as word of encouragement. I have found that by letting God be God, my understanding of Jesus has deepened through engaging different perspectives.

3. Letters are ad hoc documents addressed to the pastoral crises and needs of specific congregations by evangelists and pastor-teachers during the establishment and spread of the early Church in the age of Empire. The practical and spiritual issues are connected to socio-cultural and historical forces at work in these churches that challenged their discipleship and continue to guide the Church's response to living faithfully as the people of God. The Gospel had the capacity to cross barriers through contextualization, as the message of commitment, obedience, holiness, etc. challenged each church according to their unique issues. Once we understand this phenomenon, we can competently draw analogies to our own contemporary situations without forcing the Scriptures to say only what fits our own emotional or denominational sensitivities. **A word of encouragement:** Working in a church context will be one of the most challenging experiences of your life. Balancing the needs of people with your own personal needs requires a level of commitment that brings us to the end of ourselves. People are messy. That is what makes them interesting. Guard your hearts against anything that creates an obstacle to you loving God or others wholeheartedly. And when you fail, remember you have an advocate with the Father. Failure is how humans learn, so be kind to yourselves, dust yourselves off, and with God's loving provision build on what is good.
  
4. The church gains strength and value from the presence of different and diverse voices to the Gospel message, from the concerns of the General/Catholic epistles to the warnings and exhortations of Revelation to the 7 churches. The consistency in the proclaimed message is addressed to the ever-changing temporal realities of humans throughout church history. Different books will sound different warnings at different times and different contexts. Contexts can change but the Gospel does not! Nothing could be more essential to competent interpretation of the NT in a post-truth culture than critical reflection on all these questions. **One comment about Revelation:** Revelation is one of the most misused books of the NT. Keep focused on the message of faithful witness that overcomes by the blood of the lamb and not on false teaching that suggests God overcomes evil with violence. Divine wrath is real, but no where does God ask His people to destroy by violent acts. Human nature being what it is can quickly cross from righteous indignation to sinful thoughts and actions. Judgment is God's prerogative, and He will execute it in His time and in His way. Note that even in Revelation, the bowls of wrath are prefaced by a holy scene in heaven that suggests this is an act of unprecedented solemnity. Up to that final act, there are countless instances within Revelation of God extending opportunities to humanity for repentance. That people choose not to repent is why these final acts take place. Until then, we live in a time of forbearance where divine grace grounded in the sacrificial love of Christ is the strongest force in the world.

## NT Final Exam

**Discuss the following when approaching the Gospels for teaching, preaching, and discipleship. Be sure to support your answer with evidence and analysis.:**

- 1. Why is it important to understand historical-critical issues, such as authorship, recipients, and dating (even if we cannot determine these details definitively)? 1 to 2 paragraphs.**

It is crucial to comprehend historical-critical questions in the Bible, such as authorship, recipients, and date, for a number of reasons: Contextual comprehension We can better grasp the setting in which the biblical writings were written by considering historical-critical concerns. We can better comprehend the text's intended meaning if we are aware of the authors' and recipients' historical, social, and cultural backgrounds.

Interpretation: Accurate Bible interpretation depends on our ability to grasp historical-critical issues. It enables us to steer clear of misunderstandings that can occur if we read the text through our current lens without taking into account the historical context. Credibility: Historical-critical factors also aid in our evaluation of the biblical text's reliability. We can assess the correctness and dependability of the assertions made in the book by being aware of the historical context. Historical-critical concerns allow us to compare and contrast the Bible with other ancient texts in a comparative study. This can shed light on how religious and cultural traditions have evolved.

Engaging with historical-critical concerns is crucial for our comprehension of the Bible even though we may not always be able to determine these facts with certainty. It enables us to approach the text from a more informed and nuanced standpoint, resulting in a richer and deeper comprehension of its significance.

- 2. Present a well-reasoned argument for your ministry context as to what is significant for people's faith and interpretation of a Gospel for spiritual growth about the phenomenon that the Church has 4 canonical gospels? 1 paragraph**

In the context of my ministry, I would contend that the existence of the four canonical gospels in the Church has a substantial impact on people's perception of the Gospel and their ability to grow spiritually in a number of ways. The fact that there are four gospels gives us a diverse and comprehensive view of the person, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Together, the four gospels present a more thorough and fuller picture of who Jesus was and what he did. Also, the fact that there are four gospels highlights the value of eyewitness accounts and the veracity of the Christian message in terms of history. The accounts included in the gospels were widely accepted and regarded as authoritative by the early Church because they were written by eyewitnesses or people who were closely related to the apostles. Finally, the existence of four canonical gospels in the Church emphasizes the value of community and diversity in our spiritual development and understanding of the Gospel. We may better comprehend the depth

and complexity of the Christian faith by examining and valuing different perspectives and writings variations.

- 3. When reading the letters of Paul, one must consider the relationship between the Church's context (the recipients) and the argument Paul makes in a specific letter.**
  - a. Explain the reason why this is an essential step in reading Paul's different letters with competence. 1 paragraph.**

To effectively comprehend Paul's many letters, it is crucial to consider how the setting of the Church and the argument Paul makes in a particular letter relate to one another. comprehending the specific theological arguments stressed by Paul in his letters necessitates comprehending the context of the readers of the letters. It aids in our comprehension of Paul's motivations for addressing particular topics as well as his expectations of his audience.

- b. Focusing on Galatians, discuss the relationship between the context and the theological points emphasized. Be sure to be specific about the context and explain why these theological issues best addressed them. 1 to 2 paragraphs.**

Recognizing the context is especially crucial in the case of Galatians. A collection of churches in Galatia, an area of contemporary Turkey, were the recipients of the letter. These churches, the majority of which were Gentile—that is, not Jewish—had been converted to Christianity by Paul's preaching. However, after Paul left, some Jewish Christian missionaries arrived in Galatia and started preaching that in order for Gentile believers to be truly saved, they needed to undergo circumcision and adhere to the Jewish law, which included dietary restrictions and the observance of Jewish holidays. These false teachers insisted that Jewish rituals should be added to Paul's inadequate gospel in order to make it full for Gentile Christians.

Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians in reaction to this circumstance, passionately opposing the false teachers and defending his gospel message. He contends that, independent of any acts of the law, salvation is only received through faith in Jesus Christ. He claims that Gentile believers are totally accepted by God without the requirement of having to undergo circumcision or follow Jewish customs. Paul's theological arguments in the letter were influenced by the environment of the Galatian churches and the erroneous beliefs that had crept inside of them. Due to the fact that they were seen to be crucial indicators of Jewish identity and membership in the covenant community, the topic of circumcision and the following of the law were of great importance. Paul was attacking not only these behaviors but also the entire notion of what it meant to be a member of God's people.

4. **By the end of this course, you should be more aware of the diversity of the New Testament, as well as how the message of each book complements God's overarching purpose of reconciliation with humanity. Diversity is a hot-button issue today and education is often construed as the domain of elitists, and that includes Seminary educated pastors and teachers. It is important you are clear about the extent and limitations of diversity.**
- a. **Is diversity a problem for interpretation, or do you see a value to these different voices for the proclamation and ministry of the contemporary Church? Explain. Remember the unique presentations of the Catholic or General epistles. 1 paragraph.**

The proclamation and ministry of the contemporary Church can be both challenged by and benefited from diversity in biblical interpretation. Diversity can provide a problem since it might result in many, even opposing, readings of the same text. This makes it challenging to get a consensus on how the biblical message should be understood and can lead to confusion and disagreement within the Church. On the other side, the ministry and proclamation of the modern Church can likewise uphold variety as a value. For instance, the distinctive presentations of the General or Catholic epistles offer various viewpoints and ideas that might deepen our comprehension of the biblical message and its applicability to modern life. The variety of voices found in the Bible can also aid us in understanding the complexity and depth of the biblical message as well as the various contexts and situations to which it speaks. Additionally, a diversity of perspectives can help us communicate effectively and engage in constructive debate. We can get new insights into the biblical message and enhance our grasp of its implications for our lives and our ministry by paying attention to various viewpoints and interpretations.

- b. **Describe what steps you would take if an interpretation on a passage of Scripture was not the same as yours, and what you would do if a commentary or denomination challenged what you have always understood. 1 paragraph. This question goes to method more than content, which is a graduate level focus of critical thinking. It helps to think about how you would handle an issue ahead of time so that you are prepared to respond wisely and opened to the Spirit's guidance (1 Timothy 3:16-17).**

If I encountered a situation where someone else's interpretation of a passage of Scripture was different from mine, or if a commentary or denomination challenged my understanding, I would take the following steps:

I would pay close attention to the other person's interpretation and try to understand how they arrived at it as well as the arguments they made in favor of it. Study: To get a more comprehensive understanding, I would take the time to review the section in issue, placing it in its literary and historical context and reading a variety of translations, comments, and scholarly sources. Prayer: I would ask for God's wisdom and the Holy Spirit to guide me in understanding the meaning of the passage and how it relates to my life and ministry. Conversation: I would

have a courteous conversation with the other person, listening to what they have to say and graciously giving my own understanding. Where possible, I would seek to find common ground by asking clarifying questions. Ask for advice from reputable sources: If necessary, I would ask for advice from reputable professionals with knowledge of the relevant biblical text, such as pastors, mentors, or biblical scholars. I would carefully think about their suggestions and apply them to my own comprehension.

A faithful and correct interpretation of the passage that is based on the scriptural text, in line with the larger themes and teachings of Scripture, and applicable to my life and ministry would be the ultimate objective. I would try to accomplish this in a way that is kind to other people, receptive to new ideas, and led by the Holy Spirit.

5. **OPTIONAL:** “One thing I would like the professor and/or ATS to know about my experience in this course is: I loved the course as well as the core values it has.