

Final Examination Questions

NT 512
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I. Short answer Questions (1-1.5 pages each)

1. Acts 15:16-17 introduces a quotation from Amos into the "Apostolic Council": "After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, that the rest of humanity may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name." How does the story of Acts fulfill this prophecy? How does this demonstration of prophetic fulfillment speak to the Gentile Christian readers of Acts?

The story of Acts fulfills the prophesy of Amos through delivering to its reader what can be called a 'summary of God's purposes for humanity.' Acts 15:16-17 provides the central theme of this summary.

First, the reader can see the traditional legitimization of the Christian movement through the connection made here between God and man and the acceptance of Jesus as the anointed one of God. Israel's boundaries are redrawn and the manner of God's faithfulness in His promises to Israel is thus kept. This explanation of God's plan shows the readers that every step of God's divine work has been to bring the church to this place in the fulfillment of prophesy in its precise and present form.

Secondly, the functional legitimization of this prophesy can clearly be seen throughout the book of Acts. It displays the ability of His people to hear and rejoice in the work of the Messiah and the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel regarding the restoration of the house of David as it is displayed through the gathering in and reconstituting of God's people throughout the entire region of David's kingdom.

Third, one cannot overlook the charismatic legitimization of this Old Testament prophesy as redefined here. God has the special ability to take the natural building of a temple and transfer this to the very hearts of His people. This begins to move the boundary of

the church beyond that of historic Israel to include all those that the scriptures promised inclusion in the messianic age.

The demonstration of the prophetic fulfillment of Acts 15:16-17 to the Gentile Christian can be seen through the same three lenses that I have previously mentioned. First, there is a traditional legitimization that this Old Testament prophecy attests to the hope that the Gentiles would be called to worship the one God and that the acceptance of Gentiles was one of God's longstanding purposes. Next there is a functional legitimization in which the church in Judea and Samaria directly expand the people of God to include all the nations; thus restoring the house of David. Finally there is charismatic legitimization in the unmistakable hand of God at work in moving the Christian movement toward Gentile inclusion.

The fulfillment of this prophecy fits the central theme of the church in Acts as does the church in our world today as we sit "squarely in the plan of God and in the historic people of God, ethnic paradox notwithstanding."

2. Romans both begins and ends with a reference to "the obedience of faith," which Paul sees as the goal of his mission (1:5-6; 16:26). Based on your study of Romans and the lecture and readings, what is "the obedience of faith"? Be sure to consider Romans 6:1-8:11 within your answer. How does Paul's understanding of God's gracious provision at once demand an ethical response and prevent "works-righteousness"?

As Paul begins to write Romans, his goal of gaining support from Roman Christians begins with a greeting to establish his relationship with a church that he has not founded and to enter into the partnership of ministry with them. He intends as a part of this process to “set the record straight regarding his own commitment to living a transformed life.” Thus this early reference to “the obedience of faith” (1:3-6) begins to prime the pump for his later discussion of how the Christian can have a moral life without becoming torah observant.

Paul first provides detailed clarifications to the church at Rome regarding the ethical implications of his new life in Christ “under grace” and “without the law.” This rebuttal to accusations that his gospel encourages sin is grounded in the clear explanation of the rituals of boundary crossing in the early church. Paul’s interpretation of the significance of baptism in (6:2-4, 6, 11) favor a new framework of ritual actions by which the believers were able to pass from the sphere of the unclean to that of the clean. Through God’s gracious provision, the baptized are purified of their past that they no longer wish to own. The immersion event denounces former allegiances, affiliations and relations while rising from the water corresponds to the rite of aggregation to a new community and sanctification. Thus Romans 6:4, 7, 11, 13 show a clear transition from one status in a society to another. Paul would encourage “the obedience of faith” as that of the Christian who responds to the experience of being cleansed by continuing to walk and grow in the virtues for which God called him or her to be a part. For Paul, clearly faith and righteous deeds are inseparable and not opposed within the new life of the Christian.

Next Paul discusses the role of the law in regard to sin and displays for us God's gracious provision because under the law it was impossible to do what God requires. He reminds us of the appropriate ethical response as God provides both imputed and effective righteousness to us through counting us as righteous and transforming us into a people who do what is right in God's sight (6:12-19).

So how do we not attribute "the obedience of faith" to "works righteousness?" Paul describes how the law is upheld through a new life in the spirit. What was previously impossible is now possible, as the spirit (Romans 8:4) does in us what we could not do. Since the entire process is the result of God's gift of forgiveness and His subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit sent to us by Christ, our obedience is a response to God's gift of redemption in Jesus and is in fact enabled by God's gift of the Holy Spirit.

Thus the obedience of faith is our acceptance of His forgiveness and obedience to the will of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Works righteousness is prevented because the very acts that precipitate good works rely solely on the continued provision of God.

3. Briefly describe the main pillars of Roman imperial ideology (the emperor; Rome). How does Revelation reinterpret these pillars and lead John's readers to respond to them?

The two main pillars of Roman imperial ideology were the emperors (the Augusti) and Rome (Roma Aeterna). The imperial cult that exalted the emperor as the patron of the world was presented most notably in the title, Pontifex Maximus, which established him as the chief priest of the Roman world. In this capacity the emperor stood as the mediator between the Gods and the human race. The emperor ruled by divine right and his achievements were signs of divine favor.

The imperial cults were not imposed by the emperor and his staff rather they were initiated from below as a means of connecting with the household of the emperor. Local elites fostered the cults hoping to gain the favors and status that could be bestowed by the emperor. The emperor was seen by these cult leaders as the vessel by which the traditional gods had established order and showered their gifts on humanity. The imperial cult thus also reinforced the belief that Rome was chosen by the gods to rule the world.

The cult of the goddess, Roma Aeterna, 'eternal Rome' was tied directly to the cult of the emperor and represented the personified and deified representation of Rome. Rome was indeed seen as "the great city that rules over the kings of the earth" (Revelation 17:18) and was considered to rule the civilized world through its complete control of the Mediterranean region. The world seemed stable and secure under the controlling power of the Roman Empire. The cult of Rome claimed this honor for itself along with other honors that John would cite as egregious offenses (Revelation 18:7).

John reinterprets these pillars to show early Christians that despite the dominant cultural ideology regarding the nature of these gods, the worship of these two idols did

nothing to bring an individual in line with the cosmic order. The seemingly powerful majority were in fact the deviants who will be shown as powerless when faced with the wrath of God (Revelation 6:15-17).

John's remapping of true reality provided the necessary perspective for early Christians to persevere in their commitment to God and His leadership. The emperor, when viewed as a fraudulent priest who merely parodies the Lordship of Christ and is a source of blasphemy against God's divine appointment (Revelation 13:1, 5, 6), displays the illegitimacy of the titles and deifications of the emperor. Likewise the revealing of the "eternal city" as a city that awaits God's imminent judgment and has been already sentenced to destruction for its crimes against the apostles, saints and prophets exposes those that seek to worship Rome as ones who have fallen victim to Satan's deceit (Revelation 18:23).

John's audience was exhorted to remember who is truly worthy of honor and worship. Focusing on God's authority forces Christians to maintain firm borders and allows us to see that the ultimate recipient of such cult practices is not a benign deity but the enemy of God (Satan) whose worship is linked to that of the beast. (Revelation 13:4).

4. Christ's example plays an important role in Philippians and Hebrews (Phil 2:5-11; Heb 12:1-2). How does Christ's example address the situation faced by both audiences, and how does it lead those Christians to respond to those situations?

Philippi was a Roman colony and her citizens considered themselves as “Romans.” There were many here that participated in the imperial cult as a display of loyalty and gratitude. This background accounts for why the believers in Philippi would experience hostility from other inhabitants of the city; since their new commitment to Jesus as “Lord” competed with their obligation to Rome and her “Lord” the emperor.

Paul sends this letter of friendship in part to seek the advantage of the church in Philippi and to encourage them to regain their harmony and unity (Philippians 2:1-4); especially in light of their need for continued strength as they sought to persevere in the face of their neighbors’ growing hostility (Philippians 1:27-30).

The example of Christ plays a crucial role in addressing the needs of the Philippian Christians and urges them to respond by investing themselves in protecting the interests of one another rather than pushing their own (Philippians 2:4); to many at this time, suffering was commonly regarded as a sign of divine disfavor. Paul refutes this through utilizing the suffering of Christ as an example of God’s favor to the Christian (Philippians 2:5-11). Paul himself embraces suffering for the gospel and knows that when one suffers hostility for the sake of Christ, he/she is mystically participating in the suffering and death of Christ.

Paul’s use of the example of Christ for the Philippians was to encourage them not only to endure suffering but also to be obedient and loyal to Jesus (Philippians 2:6-7) thus gaining Christ and the prize of a resurrected life through becoming conformed to the likeness of Christ’s death (Philippians 3:10). This most prominent and celebrated example is introduced by means of a poetic passage commonly called the “Christ Hymn” (Philippians 2:6-11) and it

extols Jesus' demonstration of love and generosity toward humanity as a pattern for the people of Philippi to strive for.

Unlike Paul's letter to the Philippians, neither the identity of the author nor that of the recipients of Hebrews is known. Also, there is a notable difference in the genre and structure of this writing making it more like a speech than a written document. This speech begins with an exordium, much like the opening of a good sermon that catches the listeners' attention and forecasts what the problem is and how they are going to be encouraged through this sermon (1:1-14).

This author speaks as if some in the congregation are in danger of drifting away (2:1) from the message that they have received; of "turning away from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12). Unlike the church at Philippi that was facing increasing pressure from the external community, this church was suffering as the earlier Christian fervor of believers cooled and the lingering effects of the believer's loss of status and esteem in their neighbor's eyes was causing them to lose hope.

The climax of this writer's encomium on faith is delivered in Hebrews 12:1-3 as he presents the example of Jesus as "enduring a cross, despising shame" (Hebrews 12:2). Thus the author reframes his audiences' view of valuing society's approval and provides the crucifixion of Christ as an example of how steadfastness yields great rewards. This pattern is familiar to Paul's "Christ Hymn" (Philippians 2:6-11) and seeks to motivate readers by showing that the faithful look only to God's approval and seek honor only as recognized by God's court.

II. Essay Questions (2-3 pages, double-spaced, give or take; 25 points possible each).

1. Paul's own mindset and attitude is frequently presented by him for believers to "imitate." What does Paul's presentation of himself in Philippians and 2 Corinthians teach us about living as Christians in this world and in the church? If we follow Paul's example, what will be the distinctive marks of our mindset and ministry? What is Paul trying to teach us about viewing ourselves, others, and our ministry?

A. Paul in Philippians

Paul exhorts his converts to learn the Christian way of life by imitating him (Philippians 3:17) and in this way taught not only by words but also through his example. For the Philippians, he sought to guide them into a deeper harmony and solidarity with one another. To this end he rejected being brought into the partisanship, selfish ambition and envy that some of his colleagues were akin to (Philippians 1:15-18). Paul's response in those matters was to focus on the importance of the proclamation of the Gospel and the advancement of the interests of Christ. Paul does this by rising above the petty concerns of "coming out on top" in competition between people and focusing wholly on advancing the cause of Christ.

Paul's personal reaction to the "Judaizers" (Philippians 3:2) allows the reader to see the stark contrast of Paul's example of conduct (Philippians 3:2-21). The Judaizing movement sought to cling to fleshly credentials and claims of ethnic privilege rather than placing their confidence in Christ and Christ alone (Philippians 3:3). While Paul had claims of recognition and preeminence that would have assured him favor and esteem among his fellow Jews (Philippians 3:5-6), he instead chose to "empty himself" and discard such things. The goal of attaining Jesus was of much greater value to Paul than the name he had been making for himself prior to encountering Jesus (Philippians 3:7-8). Surely what Paul left behind shows just how great an investment and act of trust his example intends to establish for the reader.

Paul's personal example of Christian maturity also shows in his contentment to endure the privations of imprisonment (Philippians 1:19-20). These hardships are not seen as a disgrace

to him, in fact, serving God's interests in this situation prevents him from becoming demoralized. Through all of his trials Paul extols the "sufficiency" of Christ (Philippians 4:11-13) and can confidently encourage his friends that they have no need to be anxious regarding their trials because God is ever approachable in prayer; He will certainly supply His peace to their hearts and sustain them as they stay the course (Philippians 4:4-7).

B. Paul in 2 Corinthians

In 2 Corinthians, Paul again faces opposition not through Judaizers but rather those preaching a "different gospel" to the Corinthian congregation (2 Corinthians 11:4). These preachers emphasized competition, boasting, appearance and credentials. Paul therefore allows his humanness, vulnerability and seeming inadequacies to be visible for us in this letter to allow God's strength to be clearly demonstrated. For through his hardships and in his weakness, God's strength is known and made present to the churches (2 Corinthians 1:3-7, 4:10-12, 12:9-10).

Paul is intent to display for us the importance of the minister to resist the temptation to make him or herself more divine than human or the focus of trust and confidence. To this end, Paul attributes all of his successes and achievements to God (2 Corinthians 1:8-9, 2:14, 3:4-6, 4:6-7, 15). Paul also mixes his boasts with admissions of shortcomings (2 Corinthians 11:6, 12:7-8, 11). Paul seeks in these matters to utilize himself as an example of one who does not place his confidence in his credentials.

C. Personal Meaning

The example of Paul in these two letters brings to the forefront three main themes that can be utilized to live the Christian life authentically in our world and the church. Hopefully each will become distinctive marks of our ministries and churches as well because of their significance in the life of the mature Christian.

The first theme is of kinship and mutuality. Paul, through his personal example, sees no room for “selfish ambition” or “conceit” (Philippians 2:3). Paul wants us to realize that as Christians we are formed together into the likeness of Christ (Philippians 3:21). This encouragement to focus on the interests of others as we are linked together in Christ is imperative to the advancement of the gospel. Paul’s main concern as he refuted both the “Judaizers” in Philippi and the “false preachers” in Corinth was the pettiness of competition and boastful arrogance of their character when the gospel of Jesus Christ should have been their greatest concern.

Secondly there is the profound importance of persevering in spite of opposition or hardship. In Philippians, Paul exhorts his family that they share this experience together (Philippians 2:16-17). This is an experience that brings them hope and encouragement; not despair. Likewise in 2 Corinthians, Paul’s endurance of hardship proves his call as God’s servant (2 Corinthians 11:23-29). Certainly in the midst of hardship the surpassing power of God can be displayed (2 Corinthians 1:9, 4:7).

Thirdly the credentials of the Christian minister (disciple) are displayed. One is forced to observe in Paul the refusal to consider academic credentials, strength in the pulpit, numerical growth in our church, an increase in annual giving or even a lack of hardship as the external criteria which provide confidence in ministry. Paul through his own personal example calls us to be transparent; to draw attention not to ourselves but to God who has transformed us through an encounter with Him.

Putting God first in our lives and living for His will position us as humble family members who can face adversity without fear and rely on God’s call and presence to provide our strength and security. This is what Paul is trying to teach us about how we view ourselves, others and ministry.

2. Discuss the persons of the Trinity, their work, and human response in terms of patron-client relations and "grace" in its different senses, particularly with reference to the texts of Galatians and Hebrews.

Galatians

Paul's letter to the Galatians displays how important the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was for the early church to experience. It is the Spirit poured out on those who trusted Jesus Christ that made one a child of God and therefore part of the people of God. As the Holy Spirit guides the believer like a constant friend, the believer comes into conformity with God's righteousness and takes on the true character of Christ.

Paul consistently sets "grace" in opposition to "works of torah" as he refutes the false teachers and Judaizers of Galatia (Galatians 2:21, 5:4). Paul sought to encourage Christians through preventing a return to the torah as if they could add to the work that Jesus had done for them. Certainly Jesus now had the ability to connect us to God; the gift of the Holy Spirit promised to us by Jesus had the ability to transform our lives. "For if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died gratuitously" (Galatians 2:21).

The "grace" of God had been extended to us through the work of Jesus (Galatians 2:21) and it was imperative that the Galatians responded in an appropriate fashion to what God had done for humanity. Without receiving God's "grace" through the act of trust in the work of Christ, they could not receive the Spirit that would empower them through guiding their hearts in God's ways more effectively than the torah ever could. By means of the Spirit the death of Jesus becomes something in which the believer can participate, for example, Paul declares that he was "crucified together with Christ" with the result that Christ now lived in him (Galatians 2:19-20).

To these ends, Paul reacts with shock and amazement (Galatians 1:6) that anyone would consider any course of action that would detract from their faith in Jesus. To Paul this is an act of desertion and repudiation of their divine benefactor. Any other claim would ignore their own

experience in receiving the Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:1-4:21). After all, the Galatians had received the Holy Spirit on the basis of their response of trust to the hearing of the gospel of Jesus (Galatians 3:2-5) and this proved God's complete acceptance of them as Gentiles purely on the basis of their commitment to Jesus. Their trust in Jesus was enough to render them Holy to the Lord and to receive His gift of the Holy Spirit; there was no further need to perform the traditional Jewish rites as these did not produce holiness nor did they preserve the integrity of God's people as a nation any longer.

Now through the gift of God's Holy Spirit, believers were encouraged by Paul to share resources and promote one another as a way of building each other up (Galatians 6:6). In the context of their mature relationship with God through the Spirit, the words of the prophets are fulfilled and the "writing of the law on the hearts" of God's people became a reality. Now through faith in Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit by God on His people, obedience to God can truly flow from the inner person in response to God's favor and fellowship. We can accept one another on the same basis that God accepts us through "grace."

Hebrews

Similarly to the experience of the Galatians, God confirmed the testimony of the preachers here with "signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to His will" (Hebrews 2:4). In this way the activity of God had confirmed the validity of the gospel message and this congregation had been born in the deep awareness of God's presence and power.

The author of Hebrews speaks of the dangers of falling away (Hebrews 6:6) and of "trampling under foot the son of God, regarding as profane the blood by which you are sanctified, and affronting the spirit of grace" (Hebrews 10:29). This spirit of grace is one of the incredible benefits that have come through their connection with Jesus and, through Him, with

God. This topic brings us deeply into the roles, obligations and dynamics of patron-client relationships. Jesus was understood in Hebrews as the mediator or broker (Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24) whose main gift is access to the favor of another patron, in this case, God's own self. To this end, the author develops an extended comparison of Jesus with the Levitical priests (Hebrews 7:1-10:18) in order to highlight the immense and incomparable value of the benefits that Jesus has provided. In light of such great benefits and the cost undertaken by Jesus to provide these benefits, the appropriate response is to make full use of what Jesus has provided.

The nature and importance of receiving gifts well and returning gratitude in an appropriate manner (reciprocity) were highly valued in the culture of the original readers of Hebrews. Loyalty to the giver and service to the patron were themes that the author of this book utilized in order to urge these believers forward in their faith. To these ends, the author urges them to make use of the access to God that is theirs and to strain eagerly forward to that final entry into God's realm for which they have been prepared by Jesus' sacrifice and priestly intervention (Hebrews 4:14-16, 10:19-25, 12:28).

Responding to Jesus with loyalty and gratitude without regard for what may be lost in this world was an important way believers were reminded of where their true citizenship was held (Hebrews 13:13-14). The believers were also invited to exercise priestly services (sacrifices) appropriate to the access they now possessed. These services included praising the patron through the mediator (God through Christ) and the everyday activities of loving, encouraging and helping others (Hebrews 13:15-16). In these ways their loyalty to and confession of Christ is joined to loyalty and support for one another. The entire community then can encourage one another in the way the writer of Hebrews is exhorting his brothers and sisters by saying "don't lose sight of the honor and gratitude due God and God's son!"