

STMA 538: Letters of Paul
Fall 2006
School of Theology and Ministry
Seattle University

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SYLLABUS

NB: This syllabus is liable to amendment as the class moves forward. Make certain to stay current by coming to class, talking to classmates, and asking questions.

Description from the catalog: The man and the Gospel he preached; a study of the themes of his letters; the communities and world for whom he wrote; and the ways in which he challenges our faith today. Prerequisite: STMM 527

Added notes for this quarter: A little more than the first half of the class will concentrate on the individual Pauline letters, their original context, literary structure, and theological themes. Then, the class will work with hermeneutical (interpretational) issues as they arise from the Pauline letters themselves and in various present-day media.

Goals: From the course, each student is to:

1. Acquire a working grasp of the particular theological issues, general literary layout, and the historical and social contexts of Paul's individual undisputed writings, as they surface in the content of those letters, so that s/he is able to apply that knowledge to the headline exercise and other class activities.
2. Be able to synthesize this Pauline material as it applies to one passage, so as to be able to communicate an integrated position in the paper.

3. Be able to read secondary authors analytically and critically, so that s/he can engage the work of at least one scholar, Bruce Chilton in *Rabbi Paul*, (or Neil Elliott in *Liberating Paul*) in the paper.
4. Develop the skill of identifying and investigating the meaning of significant words in the text, so that s/he prepare a word study as part of the final paper.
5. Be able to identify and discuss certain ideas, themes, situations, images, and scenarios in modern American or global culture, where there is some correspondence or clash with Paul's ideas, themes, situations, images, and scenarios, so that the final paper expresses this encounter.
6. Be able to assess Paul's usefulness in addressing the situations facing people and churches today, so that such an assessment is part of the final paper.

Required readings: The books below are required for this course. There will be other readings assigned from time to time at the discretion of the instructor.

ALWAYS BRING A BIBLE (NRSV) TO CLASS.

Chilton, B., *Rabbi Paul* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

Crossan, J. D., and J. L Reed, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus's Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper, 2004).

Duling, D. C., *The New Testament: History, Literature, and Social Context* (4th edition; Belmont, CA : Thomson/Wadsworth, 2003).

Elliott, N., *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis).

Roetzel, C. J., *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context* (4th ed., Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998).

Recommended:

Callahan, A. D., *Embassy of Onesimus* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997).

Horsley, R. A., ed., *Paul and Empire* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International,

1997).

-----, *Paul and Politics* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000).

Kittredge, C., *Community and Authority: The Rhetoric of Obedience in the Pauline Tradition* (Harvard Theological Studies; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998).

Martyn, J. L., *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Abingdon: Nashville, 1997).

Pagels, E., *The Gnostic Paul* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992).

Stendahl, K., *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

Assignments and evaluation

- A. The instructor will evaluate students on the basis of their demonstration of acquisition of the objectives cited above through the following activities:
1. Attendance and participation: Attendance in a once-a-week course is particularly important; each student is expected to be present for every class. Please let the instructor know in writing if you anticipate being absent on a given day. Students are responsible for making arrangements with one another for the work they miss. Attendance and participation are not computed in the grade, except to the benefit of the student in cases of outstanding participation.
 2. **Headline exercise:** Each student will come up with a headline or title for each of the Pauline letters. These headlines or titles should encapsulate the main ideas, context, and concerns of each letter clearly enough so that others in the class will be able to recognize the letters from the headlines. **DO NOT SHARE YOUR HEADLINES WITH OTHERS** because we will be using them in an exercise in class. **For each headline write a commentary of three to five sentences explaining the headline and indicating what you had to leave out.** Word limit for the headlines: 10 words. Entire assignment should be no longer than three pages. **(30% of grade; due 2 November:)**
 3. **Final paper:** There will be a final integrative paper **due 30 November.**

See description below. (70% of grade; choice of passage and reason due: 26 October; word study choice and reason due: 2 November ; paper due: 30 November.)

- B. Policy regarding due dates of assignments and of the returning of assignments:

The instructor is not bound to accept any work late without arrangements made prior to the date on which the assignment in question is due.

The students may expect return of their assignments after grading by the third class following the due date. If the work is not returned by then, the grades for the assignment will be raised incrementally.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE FINAL PAPER

Choices of passages for the paper: Rom 1:1–7; 8:35–39; 1 Cor 1:10–17; 2 Cor 7:5–15; Gal 1:11–17; 2:11–14

The work for this paper includes the process called exegesis. This exegetical process allows us to “enter into a conversation” with the Biblical author. The other conversation partners are J. D. Crossan and J. Reed in their work, *In Search of Paul*, and B. Chilton in *Rabbi Paul*. The exegetical work moves in two different directions. On one hand, we attempt to hear the text within its original literary, rhetorical, and historical contexts. We want to understand, as best we can, what the language meant to these ancestors in faith, just as we try to uncover the situations facing them. Obviously, our methods are not going to close the 2,000-year gap between us and the Biblical authors and hearers in any complete way. However, we at least make an effort to out the ear plugs of our own cultural and theological biases so as to hear the ancient voices a bit more loudly.

The second direction of our work involves taking into account our own contexts and social locations to see how the texts “work” on us. For example, as a descendant of enslaved people, when I encounter Paul using slavery as a positive metaphor, my response will probably be different from someone with a different social location.

Although there is no one universal way to do exegesis, there are certain methods which are generally accepted to one degree or another. For the purposes of this course, follow the procedure outlined below. The steps are not intended to be a comprehensive guide to Biblical or even NT exegesis. For example, I have omitted some methods which generally are not very helpful in working on letters. Not every step listed below will be useful in answering your particular questions. Those marked with an asterisk you must do. Also, choose at least one other method.

You may incorporate the conversation with Crossan and Reed, Elliott, or with Chilton anywhere within the body of the paper.

For your purposes, the exegetical task includes:

- *1. Asking the critical questions of the text and of yourself.**
- 2. Clarifying the content of the text (textual criticism, translations)**
- *3. Putting the passage into its literary context and studying its literary features (general literary criticism)**
- *4. Exploring the socio–historical context (general historical criticism, social–scientific or sociological criticism, social historical criticism). Do not try to do all of them ; choose what is relevant for your work.**
- 5. Noting the use of traditional materials (tradition, form, source criticisms).**

6. Analyzing the argument of the writer (rhetorical criticism)
7. Examining how the “story” of the letter is told (narrative criticism)
8. Asking how text is source of liberation and/or takes on a racial, cultural, socio-economic stance or function (ideological, womanist/feminist, African American criticism)
- *9. Pursuing historical meaning of crucial vocabulary (word study)

***1. Asking the critical questions:** Even before we ask the critical questions, we need to pay attention to what we are bringing to the text. Do we have any first impressions, preconceived notions, feelings, and reactions in relationship to our passage? What do we want it to say? Sometimes these prior responses can obscure the text’s historical meaning. But sometimes what we bring to the text provides us with critical questions for digging deeper. A critical question usually asks why? how? to what degree? It often does not have a yes or no answer. It is concerned with meaning rather than simply relating what has occurred. Have at least two and no more than four of these questions.

2. Clarifying the content of the text (textual criticism, translations): Here we take note of the footnotes that supply textual commentary on the variations in the ancient manuscripts for this passage. If the differences are important to the meaning of the text, you can explore them using critical commentaries. If not, you may mention in your paper that there are problems but they are irrelevant to your task, or you may say that there are no variations. At this point we also compare translations to see where scholars have disagreed over an important term. Terms identified in this process are good candidates for word studies.

***3. Putting the passage into its literary context and studying its literary features (general literary criticism):** Where does this passage fit in the larger letter? On what basis is it a unit that can be considered on its own (breaks in the text, change of subject, movement to different section [rhetorical or formal] of the letter)? What immediately precedes and follows it? How does

this context affect our understanding of its meaning? How is the passage structured? How would you outline it? What are its important words, motifs, images? How do figures of speech highlight certain points?

***4. Exploring the socio–historical context (general historical criticism, social–scientific or sociological criticism, social historical criticism).** Do not try to do all of them ; choose what is relevant for your work: What do we know about the situation of the writer and/or audience? When was this letter written? What is going on in and around the community: war, exile, persecution, etc. What is the social status of the audience? of the author? How are cultural patterns of the larger community played out in the Christian community represented here?

5. Noting the use of traditional materials (tradition, form, source criticisms). Does the author quote earlier traditions and forms (sayings of Jesus, the Hebrew Bible, hymns, poems, household codes, etc.); and, if so, how does s/he alter them to fit the purposes? Can we detect the use of a source or sources behind the finished product? Again, how does the author use as part of the argument?

6. Analyzing the argument of the writer (rhetorical criticism): How do the categories of ancient rhetoric help us in understanding the meaning of the passage? What kind of rhetorical function does the letter have? (See Kennedy.)

7. Examining how the “story” of the letter is told (narrative criticism): What is the story behind the letter? What are the events in the plot as presented by the author? How does the ordering of events aid our comprehension of the meaning? Who are the characters? How are they presented? What clues does this presentation give us as to the author’s attitudes and intentions?

8. Asking how text is source of liberation and/or takes on a racial, cultural, socio–economic stance or function (ideological, womanist/feminist, African American criticism): What social sub–group benefits from this text? How might it have functioned oppressively? Does the text have a liberative message? If so, what?

***9. Pursuing historical meaning of crucial vocabulary (word study):**

(See separate handout.)

This paper should also include the insights of Bruce Chilton (*Rabbi Paul*) or Neil Elliott (*Liberating Paul*) and John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan Reed (*In Search of Paul*) about the passage. This discussion may be interwoven into any pertinent part of the paper, or you may do separate section on it.

The order suggested for the paper is:

1. Introduction (identify passage, reasons, questions; give layout of paper)
2. Sections on various methods (at least historical and literary context)
(separate section on secondary texts)
3. Verse-by-verse commentary (synthesis of all the methods)
4. Summary of major issues and findings
5. Hermeneutical approach (meeting between your understanding of the text from this work and contemporary society)

Guidelines for Reading NT Letters

Without the narrative appeal of the gospels, sometimes the NT letters seem dry and difficult to engage. The guidelines here are designed to give you specific information to track so that you can be an active participant this encounter. Pretend that reading this letter is like overhearing a conversation in a restaurant. You don't have all the details or the background, but you can try to construct the larger picture from what you hear. You may be off-base, but you are at least an active part of the interaction.

This method calls for multiple readings of the letters. However, as you become more proficient, you will be able to combine some of the readings.

1. The first reading is to be done quickly. Pay attention to what strikes you in any way, passages that are familiar, ideas that don't make sense, favorite lines, anomalies, etc. You are trying to find out what you are bringing to the text. What you are bringing to it may well affect what you see in it, so you need to take note of your first reactions.
2. The next reading is a literary one. Here you look first of all for logical divisions in the text: where there is a change of subject, a change of paragraph, a movement from instructions to greetings, etc. You want to end up with a very basic outline of the letter. Also watch for distinctive vocabulary, for repeated words or phrases, and for figures of speech.
3. The third reading is a social and historical one. You are looking for clues about the circumstances that led to this letter? What is the relationship between the sender and the recipients? What are the issues facing this community? What is their social status? Are they Gentile or Jewish in background?
4. The fourth reading is the theological one. You identify the terms that have theological impact to see how they are being used. Always ask if the writer is using these terms in the same way in which we understand them. Examine your own thinking about the passage. How does it sit with you given your concerns?

5. After you have finished these readings then write up a brief summary of them, no more than three sentences for each reading. Now when you read textbooks and other works on the letter, you have your own work to bounce off them.

Chart For Reading New Testament Letters

Verses	1 st reading: 1 st impressions	2d reading: literary details and structure	3d reading: historical rhetorical and social context	4 th reading: distinctive theological message

Class Schedule

# and date	Topic(s), Activities	Preparation for class	Due/hand in
1, 21 Sept.	Introduction to class, each other, Paul, 1 Thessalonians		Diagnostic exercise
2, 28 Sept.	1 Thessalonians, Galatians	Read: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians; R: 51–83, 96–103; D: chs 5–6	
3, 5 Oct.	Galatians, 1 Corinthians	Read: Galatians, 1 Corinthians; R: 83–103; D: chs 5–6;	
4, 12 Oct.	1 and 2 Corinthians	Read: Corinthian correspondence; R: 83–96; D: chs 5–6on Corinthian correspondence; R: relevant portions, ch. 3; M: relevant portions.	
5, 19 Oct.	Romans	Read Romans; R: 103–113; D: chs 5–6	
6, 26 Oct.	Philippians and Philemon	Read: Philippians and Philemon; R: 113–118; D: chs 5–6;	Passage choice due. Conference on final paper
7, 2 Nov.	Headline exercise	Prepare headline exercise.	Headline exercise; Conference on final paper
8, 9 Nov.	Issues of interpretation: Paul's questions and Paul's answers The questions and answers of early interpreters	Read: 7 undisputed letters; 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, the Pastoral Epistles; R: 119–189; D: chs 2–3;	Word study choice due. Conference on final paper
9, 16 Nov.	Issues in interpretation: Our questions and answers encounter Paul's	Read Martyn handout; D: chs 2–3	Conference on final paper
10, 30 Nov.	Issues in interpretation: presentations from papers		Final paper

R: Roetzel; **D:** Duling. Assignments from Elliott, Chilton, and Crossan and Reid given in class.