

1 CORINTHIANS

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Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Louisville, Kentucky

This online syllabus should be used to gain a better understanding of the content and focus of a course. The syllabus given out in the class may differ from this online version and its content supersedes that of the online syllabus.

This course focuses on the first letter of Paul to the church in Corinth. The goal is to help students to achieve an understanding of Paul's involvement with the Corinthians—the problems that beset that congregation, the solutions offered in the letter—and the theological implications of the letter. The course is designed to assist students in advancing the development of interpretive skills through examination of a variety of key passages and/or topics and the writing of a paper on some crucial portion of, or topic in, 1 Corinthians. Moreover, we shall compare the Corinthian situation(s) to the life of the Church today, applying Paul's thought in the letter to some situations faced by the contemporary Church.

Course Requirements

1. A reflection paper—due February 17.

Read 1 Corinthians several times (perhaps using an interlinear and) in different translations from the one that you normally read. Try the New American Standard Bible, the New King James Version, the Today's New International Version, the Revised English Bible, the New Revised Standard Version—or one of the many other translations. Avoid paraphrases. By all means avoid so-called "study Bibles" with the prepackaged outlines and superimposed themes.

Once you believe you are familiar with Paul's letter, pretend you are a leading member of the church in Corinth and write a letter responding to some issue in Paul's own letter. You may take any approach you wish, so long as you engage in a substantive exchange with Paul focused on the concerns he himself identified or raised in his own letter. Please refer only to 1 Corinthians and pretend that you do not even know that Paul has written other letters to other congregations.

Your letter should be 2 double-spaced typewritten pages at most.

2. An interpretive paper of 15-20 double-spaced typewritten pages with fonts and margins approximate to those of this syllabus. An explanation of what these papers are to include follows below in the materials included with this syllabus. The work will be done in this manner:

On February 24 each student will submit a brief (1 page) proposal for the paper. The proposal should (a) name either a passage or a topic in 1 Corinthians that will be the focus of the work, (b) give the reason it was chosen, and (c) offer a brief 5-10 item preliminary bibliography. After the professor examines the proposal it will be approved, modified, or rejected. This final paper is due May 7.

Grading

Attendance and participation will amount to 30% of the grade in this course, though the remaining 70% will be directly affected by whether or not you are faithful in class attendance and participation. Participation is not merely talking, but saying something germane that reveals careful preparation and engagement with the text and assignments.

The initial reflection paper (letter to Paul) amounts to 10% of the grade for the course.

The final paper (including the proposal) will count 60% (10% proposal; 50% paper) of the final grade.

Late work will be penalized accordingly.

Books for the Course

Each student is required to have and read the appropriate materials in the following:

1. A New Testament—either English or Greek.
 2. Murphy-O'Connor, J. *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Good News Studies 6; Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983/2002).
 3. The following commentaries on 1 Corinthians:
 - a. Hays, R. B. *First Corinthians* (IBC; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997).
 - b. Soards, M. L. *1 Corinthians* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999); and
- * In addition to these books there are several other, important and helpful volumes pertaining to 1 and 2 Corinthians available in the library and bookstore.
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SCHEDULE

For each class session students should read the relevant portions of the epistle and the relevant portions of the commentaries. All should be prepared to discuss the assigned passages in class. Other reading is encouraged (but not required): e.g., study important journal articles and monographs referred to in the bibliographies and notes of the commentaries; read and reflect upon parallel passages in Paul's other letters and in other pertinent ancient literature.

Introductory Matters: Paul and Corinth

February 5 & 10 Introduction to the Course-Its Focus, Goals, and Methods
Survey of Paul's Life, World, Work, and Thought

Assignment (for 2/5 and 2/10): Read Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*.

February 12 & 17 Placing 1 Corinthians in History

Assignment: Read introductory portions of the commentaries; your "letter to Paul" is due (2/17).

1 Corinthians 1:1—4:21—Coming to Terms with the Corinthians

February 19 & 24 *1 Corinthians 1:1—2:16*—Divisions, Christ, and Wisdom

Assignment: Submit proposal for paper (2/24).

February 26 & *1 Corinthians 3:1—4:21*—Christian Ministry and Christian Ministers
March 3

1 Corinthians 5:1—11:1—Daily Christian Life (in Corinth)

March 5 & 10 *1 Corinthians 5:1—6:20*—Judgments and "Physical" Piety

March 12 & 17 *1 Corinthians 7:1—40*—Christianity and the Status Quo

March 19 & *1 Corinthians 8:1—11:1*—Values, Personal Rights, and God's Glory
April 7

1 Corinthians 11:2—14:40—Worship as Congregational Life and Charismatic Activity

April 14 & 16 *1 Corinthians 11:2—12:31a*—Worship and Spiritual Gifts

April 21 & 23 *1 Corinthians 12:31b—14:40*—Church Life, Charismata, and "Order"

1 Corinthians 15:1—58—Christ's Resurrection and Its Meaning for the Church's Proclamation and Life

April 28 & 30 Paul's Teaching and the Corinthian Controversies

1 Corinthians 16:1—24—Bringing the Letter to a Close

May 5 & 7 The Collection, Travel Plans, and Some Advice

Assignment: Paper due.

ISSUES FOR EXEGETICAL PAPERS
(for full final papers)

Broadly speaking, exegesis is the process of interpreting a text; and it comprises four large concerns:

1. Determining the text--*What is the text?—(textual criticism).*
2. Translating the text--*strongly related to item 3.*
(Compare at least two English translations of the passage.)
3. Analyzing the text--*What does the text say?—(interpretation).*
4. Summarizing or applying the text--*What is the significance of the text?—(appropriation).*

These activities may be broken down further for the purposes of thorough "exegesis." Your exegetical paper will need to evince all four activities in some fashion. In a final form, the paper should probably have five parts:

1. An outline of the passage.
2. An overview of the exegetical problems for interpreting the text (the major portion of the paper).
3. A summary of the historical, ethical, or theological significance of the passage.
4. A statement of how this study might inform or guide the practice of ministry in administration, counseling, teaching, or preaching.
5. A bibliography.

In doing the work, you may want to consider some of the following issues. But, be sure that you are attentive to the text. Let it set the agenda. Listen, then, speak. Questions and considerations differ from one passage to another, and so, the first lesson to learn is that while there may be a finite number of questions which we are capable of posing in relation to the interpretation of the

Bible, the combinations are nearly limitless; and you can determine which questions are appropriate only by considering the text. As Sean E. McEvenue has said, "The fact is that method is nothing more than a description and systematization of acts of understanding ... ultimately the researcher must simply stare at [the] text, or fumble with it, until acts of understanding begin to take place."

Outline

Formal structure. Are there patterns in the text? Repetitions? Chiastic arrangements? Balanced clauses? Or, is the material some clear rhetorical form?

and/or

Logical structure. What is the line of thought, argument, or reasoning? What are the points? The illustrations of points?

Exegetical Considerations

Establishing the text. The English texts are translations of critically established Greek texts, determined by studying scores of ancient manuscripts that are not always in agreement. Thus, to get behind some of the decisions made by textual critics you may want to study several different translations, reading the footnotes and annotations provided in many of these about textual variants. The critical apparatus in the UBS 4th or the N-A 27th texts are crucial. B. M. Metzger's *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* is quite useful. Critical commentaries are often helpful here.

The text in its context. There is an old saying, "A text out of context means something, anything, and nothing." To understand the meaning of a text, it is crucial to understand where it appears in the whole document. What preceded the passage? What follows? How does the passage fit into its context? What is going on in the text in general? Why was the whole document written? What motivated the writing of the section in which the passage under consideration appears? The passage itself?

Determining the type of material, its form, and detecting traditional materials that the author employed or from which inspiration was drawn.

What kind of material are you dealing with?

Narrative? Epistle? Both--i.e., one within the other or a hybrid?

What does the passage do?

Narrate? Declare? Report? Summarize? Respond? Admonish?

Does the passage contain "traditional" material?

An OT quotation or allusion? Early Christian traditions? Liturgical material--hymn, confession, prayer, other?
 What is the tone of the material?
 Didactic? Humorous? Witty? Ironic? Hostile? Sarcastic?
 How is the material constructed?
 Are there rhetorical devices--midrash or pesher, allegory, diatribe/dialogical? Rhythm? "Poetic" arrangement?

What is the language of the passage? Are there crucial words or phrases? Consult concordances, NT and "theological" dictionaries, commentaries, and journal articles (use New Testament Abstracts to get at these). Remember, words have usage, not meaning. They denote in context of phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and the overall context of one's thought. Beware of defining a word and then going about plugging that predetermined sense into every text you encounter--sometimes this may work, but often not.

Considering similar texts. Often there are helpful "parallels" to the biblical passages in other literature, canonical and non-canonical--but contemporary to the text! Commentaries and lexica frequently point to these, and in annotated versions of the Bible there are usually cross-reference apparatuses. Are there similar texts in Paul? In the OT, apocrypha, or pseudepigrapha? The Dead Sea Scrolls? Hellenistic literature--philosophers, playwrights, historians--e.g., Plato, Epictetus, Philo, Lucian, Sophocles, Pliny the Younger, Josephus, Tacitus? NT apocrypha? Apostolic "fathers"? Rabbinic literature?

Significance

Strikingly there are two dimensions to this consideration and a number of different appreciations of the relation of the two: (1) what the text meant; and (2) what the text means.

1. *What the text meant.* Though not all scholars agree on the meaning of every text, one is more likely to find a consensus on what a text meant to its first readers than on what it should mean for Christians today. By examining and thinking about texts we can determine a range of POSSIBLE meanings that, in light of all factors, moves toward WHAT IS PROBABLE. In this area one may need to address theological, ethical, and historical concerns.

What understanding of God, Christ, the Spirit, or human existence does the passage evince? How would the content of the passage affect Christian living? How does the passage affect our understanding of early Christianity?

2. *What the text means.* The implications and importance of the text for modern ethical and theological considerations sometimes produces a parting of the ways among scholars, often because of denominational sensibilities. How does the passage speak

to the Church today? What is your evaluation of the message? Do you have problems with the teaching or with the reaction of some person to the passage? How do you propose to deal with this?

Footnotes and Bibliography

List items, in standard form, that were important or helpful for your study.

Policy on Inclusive Language:

In speech and in written assignments, it is the policy of the school to avoid divisive terms that reinforce stereotypes or are pejorative. Do not use language that leaves out part of the population, perpetuates stereotyping, or diminishes importance. Do not use male pronouns (such as “men”) to refer to a group that includes females as well. Consult the Academic Support Center for additional guidance if necessary. See:

http://www.lpts.edu/Academic_Resources/ASC/avoidinggenderbiasinlanguage.asp.

Academic Honesty

All work turned in to the instructors is expected to be the work of the student whose name appears on the assignment. Any borrowing of the ideas or the words of others must be acknowledged by quotation marks (where appropriate) and by citation of author and source. Students unfamiliar with issues relating to academic honesty can find help from the staff in the Academic Support Center and should make use of the available resources at an early date, since violations of seminary policy on academic honesty can lead to a failing grade for the course.