

**[Draft]**

**Canadian Mennonite University**

Graduate School of Theology and Ministry

Course Syllabus

**BTS-5276 Paul and His Letters: Topic - *The Letters to Corinth and Philippi***

Winter Semester 2019-2020 (3.0 credit hours)

Wednesdays and Fridays (Sep 4 ~ Nov 29); 8:30-9:45AM

**Instructor:** Gordon Zerbe, PhD (Princeton Theological Seminary, New Testament); MA (Biblical Studies, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary); MA (Western Washington, Cultural Anthropology)  
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*Note: The last day to make registration changes is September 13; the last day for voluntary withdrawal from the course is November 12.*

**I. Course Description**

Following a general introduction to Paul, his life, ministry, and theological method as expressed in his letters, this course will focus on Paul's letters to the Corinthians and to the Philippians. The course will give attention to matters such as (a) the interpretation of particular sections of the letters, (b) the shape of each letter's rhetorical and theological argumentation, (c) the ecclesial, social, political context of the letters, (d) the coherent theology of Paul that is expressed or assumed by the letters, (e) the context of the letter in Paul's life, ministry and thought, and (f) the meaning of the letters for contemporary Christian reflection.

**II. Course Objectives**

In this course students will

- acquire skills in the close reading and interpretation of Paul letters to Corinth and Philippi;
- develop an understanding of the letter structure and theological argumentation of these letters;
- gain an appreciation for the rhetorical, strategic and pastoral aims that appear to have motivated Paul in writing these letters, in connection with challenges within the emerging movement of Christ-adherents and in relation to dynamics and pressures from the broader Greco-Roman world;
- become familiar with the main contours in the history of Christian interpretation of these letters, and to reflect on their significance for contemporary Christian thought and practice.

**III. Required Textbooks**

One substantial commentary one or both of the Corinthian letters (see below, "Selected Commentaries" for recommendations).

Gordon Zerbe, *Philippians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Herald Press, 2016)

Recommended: Gordon Zerbe, *Citizenship: Paul on Peace and Politics*. CMU Press, 2012 (some selected essays will be assigned).

**IV. Course Requirements**

1. Class preparation. As way to encourage interaction, prior to each class sessions students are expected to read the appropriate passage(s) in the letter being considered, and counterpart

sections in one of the recommended commentaries. Responsibilities to raise key questions for class deliberation, pertaining to a given text, will be assigned as the course proceeds.

2. Short class/seminar presentation on a passage from one of the letters. Students should prepare a short (1,250-word) exegetical probe as the basis for the presentation and ensuing discussion, emailed to the rest of the class and the instructor by noon the day before the class in question. Note: I am open to discussing the possibility of a probe/presentation from one of the other letters of Paul (apart from Philippians and the Corinthian letters).
3. Research paper on a passage or topic from the letters being studied. 3,500 words minimum. This may be on the same passage for the class presentation  
Due: December 11, 2019
4. Supplementary Reading report, approx. 300-500 pages. Either select a second commentary to read alongside one of the commentaries read during the course of study, or select a topic of interest for further reading (from a monograph or a series of articles), different from the one you will focus on in your major research paper. Provide a 750-word report on supplementary reading.  
Due December 11, 2019

## V. Course Outline

- A. An orientation to Paul: his life, ministry, letters, and theology
- B. A study of Philippians
- C. A study of 1 Corinthians
- D. A study of 2 Corinthians

## VI. Grading Summary

1. Attendance and Participation 20%
2. Class Presentation 20%
3. Research Paper 40%
4. Supplementary reading report 20%

## VII. Selected Commentaries

- Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*. IVP Academic, 2011.
- Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament). Eerdmans, 1987.
- Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*. Interpretation: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Westminster/John Knox Press, 2011.
- Richard A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries). Abingdon, 1998.
- PHEME PERKINS, *First Corinthians* (Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament). Baker Academic, 2012.
- Calvin J. Roetzel, *2 Corinthians* (Abingdon New Testament Commentary). Abingdon, 2007.
- V. George Shillington, *2 Corinthians* (Believers Church Bible Commentary). Herald Press, 1998.
- Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. Eerdmans, 1995
- Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (New Testament for Everyone), and *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* (New Testament for Everyone). Westminster/John Knox Press, 2004.