

NT 3XL3 – Dealing with a Difficult Church: A Study in 1 Corinthians

McMaster Divinity College
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Online: January–April 2016
Face-to-Face: Feb 18 (9:00am–4:00pm)
Feb 19 (9:00am–12:00pm)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

As all Christian leaders know, churches are sometimes hard to deal with—and the Apostle Paul's congregation in Corinth was no exception. In this course, we will examine 1 Corinthians, in which Paul expresses his displeasure at a wide range of problems plaguing the Corinthian Christian community. By reflecting upon the problems Paul addresses and the way that he addresses them, we will learn about church leadership and we will learn to better appreciate the complexities that arise whenever the gospel encounters new cultures.

SPECIALIZATIONS

Biblical Studies (BS)

Students taking this as a Biblical Studies course will be encouraged to explore the historical and cultural setting of 1 Corinthians, as well as scholarly debates concerning the interpretation of its contents.

Church and Culture (CC)

Students taking this as a Church and Culture (CC) course will be encouraged to reflect upon the complexities of Paul's engagement with Corinthian culture and to consider the related difficulties that emerge when the Christian tradition engages with contemporary cultures today.

Pastoral Studies (PS)

Students taking this as a Pastoral Studies (PS) course will be encouraged to explore how the ideas and exhortations in 1 Corinthians are relevant for Christian faith and practice in the 21st century, with special emphases on leadership and communal purity/integrity.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

In this course, students will be encouraged to:

Knowing

- Remember the basic outline of 1 Corinthians
- Become familiar with the historical setting of 1 Corinthians
- Understand the major theological and ethical teachings found in 1 Corinthians

Being

- Appreciate the importance of participating in critical and respectful discussions concerning biblical texts
- Become sensitive to the historical and cultural environment in which the early church first communicated the gospel
- Become competent interpreters of Paul
- Embody a cruciform way of life

Doing

- Read books that engage with 1 Corinthians in a careful and critical manner
- Take time to reflect on the relevance of 1 Corinthians
- Talk intelligently about 1 Corinthians
- Discuss how 1 Corinthians is relevant to contemporary Christianity

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Note: Students are required to complete all of the following assignments. No unfinished assignments are permitted. Each written assignment should be uploaded in PDF format to the designated Avenue to Learn dropbox. A penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments. Assignments cannot be submitted after April 15th without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (thomn@mcmaster.ca).

Face-to-Face Class Attendance and Participation (0%)

Students are expected to attend the face-to-face class sessions and to participate in class discussions. At various times during these sessions, students will break in small groups in order to reflect upon 1 Corinthians and its contemporary relevance, and it is expected that students will participate in these small group discussions.

Online Readings and Discussion (30%)

Each week, students will read Thiselton's commentary on 1 Corinthians (see the "Textbooks" section below) as well as some electronic readings posted by the professor on Avenue to Learn. An online form will be used each week as a way for students to quickly and easily report their reading progress, and an online discussion board will permit students to discuss the various readings with fellow students. The overall grade for this course requirement will encompass reading and online participation, with both aspects combining quantity and quality (i.e. How much was read/discussed? And how thoughtfully was the material read/discussed?). As a bare minimum, it is expected that each student will initiate one new discussion topic each week, and so students will not be able to view/reply to other posts until this new topic has been posted.

Interpretive Essay Outline (7.5%)

Prior to the in-class sessions (i.e. by **11:59pm on February 12th**), each student must submit a draft outline of their interpretive essay (see below) together with a preliminary list of secondary sources that will be used in the essay. There is no specific length requirement for the outline, but it should be kept in mind that a more complete outline will produce a more useful peer evaluation (see below). In order to make the most of the peer-evaluation process, students should attempt to submit a complete outline of the paper, including a rough draft of its contents and its logical argument. Because the outlines will be emailed to fellow students, *students should refrain from including any self-identifying information in their submissions* (e.g. no name on the title page). The Avenue to Learn system will keep track of whose assignment is whose.

Evaluation of a Peer's Outline (7.5%)

Following the in-class sessions, each student's interpretive essay outline will be randomly distributed via email to a fellow student in the course. Each student will then produce an *anonymous* peer-evaluation of the outline he or she has received. This evaluation must assess the structure and content of the paper as well as the clarity and plausibility of its argument, and it must make specific recommendations for the improvement of these. It should also assess the secondary sources cited by the outline and (ideally) propose additional sources that might assist the author of the paper. Peer-evaluations must be uploaded to A2L before **11:59pm on February 26th**. Please note that the grade for this component assesses whether or not the student has effectively assisted a fellow student's research and writing. The grade is *not* assigned by the peer evaluator as an assessment of the student's own essay outline.

Interpretive Essay (35%)

For the major written assignment in this course, each student will write an interpretive essay that is approximately 3,500 words in length and that follows the "McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses." The paper must be grounded in a specific, well-defined passage from 1 Corinthians, and it must incorporate the following three elements: (1) a discussion of Paul's historical context and the manner in which the passage addresses that context; (2) a discussion of how Paul's mission and message engaged with first-century Corinthians culture and how this engagement can provide insights for contemporary engagement with 21st-century cultural contexts; and (3) a discussion of the practical applicability of the passage to a specific 21st-century context. Although all student papers must include these three elements, the proportion of the paper that should be devoted to each element will vary depending upon the student's specialization:

- ❖ Biblical Studies. Students in the Biblical Studies specialization are required to devote the majority of their paper to the first of the three required elements. The essay should focus on scholarly debates regarding the original context of the Epistle (incl. date, author, addressees, etc.), the specific background of the selected passage (e.g. persecution, relationship between James and Paul, illness and healing, etc.), as well as the content and

meaning of the passage itself (e.g. textual variants, grammar, logical argumentation, theology, etc.).

- ❖ Church & Culture. Students in the Church & Culture specialization are required to devote the majority of their paper to the second required element. The essay should focus on how Paul’s mission engaged with first-century Corinthian culture and how this cultural engagement can provide insights for the issues involved in engaging 21st-century cultures.
- ❖ Pastoral Studies. Students in the Pastoral Studies specialization are required to devote the majority of their paper to the third of the three required elements. The essay should reflect deeply and responsibly on how the selected passage in the Epistle speaks into the specific 21st-century Christian community selected for consideration by the student, and how a church leader might actually implement change in such a context in response to 1 Corinthians.

The interpretive essay is due at **11:59pm on April 8th**. For students who are uncertain about what constitutes an effective interpretive essay, a detailed grading rubric will be made available on A2L.

Concluding Response Paper (20%)

At the conclusion of the semester, each student will synthesize the course and assess its impact upon their own learning. In preparation for writing this concluding response, students should review the things they have learned from Thiselton’s *Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, assigned electronic readings, online video primers, course lectures, face-to-face and online discussions—and/or anything else that has contributed to the student’s course experience. Each student should then articulate a thoughtful and critical response to the course with a focus upon new growth and ongoing questions. This response must demonstrate familiarity with the course content (including quotations of and/or references to specific facets of the course), but the focus of the response should be the following questions: (1) *How has the course as a whole illuminated the relevance of 1 Corinthians for contemporary Christianity?* and (2) *How have you grown through the course and where do you see room for future growth?* The results of this exercise must be written up in a paper that is 2,500 words in length and that follows the “McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses.” Papers are due on **April 12th @ 11:59pm**.

GRADING SUMMARY

Online Readings and Discussion	30%
Interpretive Essay Outline	7.5%
Evaluation of a Peer’s Outline	7.5%
Interpretive Essay	35%
Concluding Response Paper	20%
Total	100%

TEXTBOOKS

Students are required to possess the following:

An English translation of the New Testament.

Thiselton, Anthony C. *First Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

All required textbooks for this class are available from the College's book service, READ On Bookstore, Room 145, McMaster Divinity College. Texts may be purchased on the first day of class. For advance purchase, you may contact READ On Bookstore, 304 The East Mall, Suite 100, Etobicoke, ON M9C 5K1: phone 416.620.2934; fax 416.622.2308; email books@readon.ca. Other book services may also carry the texts.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Dates	Class Topics
Jan 4–8	Welcome Introduction to the Course and to A2L
Jan 11–15	The Historical Setting of 1 Corinthians Practical Matters (16:1–21)
Jan 18–22	Sophistication in an Age of Arrogance (1:10–2:5)
Jan 25–29	Collaboration in an Age of Competition (2:6–4:13)
Feb 1–5	Purity in an Impure World (4:14–6:20)
Feb 8–12	Family in the Shadow of the Apocalypse (7:1–40) Essay Outline Due Feb 12 @ 11:59pm
Face-to-Face Feb 18	The Leadership Issues Underlying 1 Corinthians The Cultural Collisions Underlying 1 Corinthians
Face-to-Face Feb 19	The Relevance of 1 Corinthians Today
Feb 22–26	Love in an Age of Idolatry (8:1–9:23) Peer Evaluation Due Feb 26 @ 11:59pm

Feb 29–Mar 4	Fear in an Age of Idolatry (9:24–11:1)
Mar 7–11	Dignity in a Male-Dominated Culture (11:2–16)
Mar 14–18	Solidarity in an Age of Social Inequality (11:17–34)
Mar 21–25	Love in the Expression of Spirituality (12:1–14:40)
Mar 28–Apr 1	Anticipation in an Age of Gratification (15:1–58)
Apr 8	Interpretive Essays Due
Apr 12	Concluding Reflections Due

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

See Thiselton, *A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, pp. 304–11.

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

The following guidelines are presented to encourage all students to participate together in this course, and should be kept in mind at all times.

1. Please respect the opinions of others, even if you do not agree with them. Extend courtesy by not ridiculing others' ideas, but feel free to respond to them logically and critically and in an orderly manner.
2. Students should be on time to class, or be prepared to offer an explanation after class to the professor.
3. Students are expected to stay for the entire class session, unless arranged in advance.
4. Students may eat and drink in class so long as they do not distract others or leave a mess behind.
5. Students should not engage in anything during class time that prevents them from focusing and participating in class discussions.
6. Students are not to carry on private conversations in class. If something is unclear, the whole class will benefit by a question being asked out loud.
7. Cell phones and related devices are to be silenced during class. If a student must for some reason accept a phone call, he or she ought to discretely leave the class in order to do so.

Students who fail to respect these guidelines will be dismissed from the class, with all of the consequences implied.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC HONESTY

Academic dishonesty is a serious offence that may take any number of forms, including plagiarism, the submission of work that is not one's own or for which previous credit has been obtained, and/or unauthorized collaboration with other students. Academic dishonesty can result in severe consequences, e.g., failure of the assignment, failure of the course, a notation on one's academic transcript, and/or suspension or expulsion from the College. Students are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty. Please refer to the Divinity College Statement on Academic Honesty (<http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>).

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) for plagiarism detection. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com can submit an electronic copy of their work via email in PDF format and no penalty will be assigned, but all submitted work is subject to normal verification standards in order to ensure that academic integrity has been upheld (e.g. online search).

STYLE

All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the *McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses*:

https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/sites/default/files/documents/mdc_styleguide.pdf

Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all of its publications. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected. The NRSV and TNIV are examples of the use of inclusive language for human beings. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments.

This syllabus is the property of the instructor and is prepared with currently available information. The instructor reserves the right to make changes and revisions up to and including the first day of class.