

## NT 3XC3: Colossians: Living the Fullness of Christ

McMaster Divinity College  
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Online: September–December 2016  
Face-to-face: Oct 13 (9am–4pm)  
Oct 14 (9am–1pm)

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”

At the heart of the letter to the Colossians is the question, how do we regulate Christian life? Some in the church of Colossae are being attracted to a kind of teaching that emphasizes rules and regulations. Paul, on the other hand, vehemently rejects the reduction of Christian faith to a list of dos and don'ts. In Paul's mind, Christian behaviour should be the result of dying and rising with Christ and now living the fullness of Christ in a community. The message of Colossians serves as a timely reminder to the contemporary church to continue in the truth of Christ amidst an onslaught of both religious and secular influences.

This course is an exegetical and interpretive study of Paul's epistle to the Colossians. Following a two-step hermeneutical approach, we will look closely at the text and learn to understand and articulate its original historical meanings. We will then reflect on the contemporary relevance of the epistle.

Because this is a hybrid course, it is structured around online instructions and discussions. Assigned readings will be used to introduce the student to the background and theology of Colossians. An online forum will be set up on Avenue to Learn to facilitate a collaborative learning environment. Students are also encouraged to visit the instructor during office hour (or by appointment) to discuss any questions raised in the forum and/or the assignments.

### SPECIALIZATIONS

#### ***Biblical Studies (BS)***

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

#### ***Pastoral Studies (PS)***

Students taking this as a Pastoral Studies course will be encouraged to explore how the ideas and exhortations in Colossians are relevant for Christian faith and practice in the contemporary world.

Doctor of Practical Theology students who wish to apply for this course as an Advanced Elective for their degree program must consult with the Program Director of the DPT and the course instructor in order to develop an Advanced Elective approach to the course that fulfills the specific elements required by the DPT program. Once the elements of the Advanced Elective have been agreed upon by the student, the Program Director, and the instructor, a

formal application can be made for an Advanced Elective in connection with this course. Once the application is accepted, DPT students can proceed with the course as part of their degree program.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

The following goals are set for the student:

Knowing:

- To become familiar with basic outline and the text of Colossians for use in teaching and preaching ministry
- To gain an understanding of exegetical and theological issues involving the letter to the Colossians and to be able to identify the relevant text(s)
- To know more advanced concepts for study of the exegetical methods that aid in the interpretation of individual passages

Being:

- To become sensitive to the historical and culture environment of the early church
- To appreciate the value of being able to exegete the text for use in ministry
- To allow Colossians to motivate, form and transform faith, worship and Christian way of life

Doing:

- To explain key topics and major exegetical issues related to Colossians
- To access resources that engage with Colossians in a careful and critical manner
- To develop and practice responsible exegetical methods that draw upon the varied resources available (commentaries, bible software, etc.)

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Students are required to complete all of the following assignments. All assignments should be uploaded in PDF format to the designated Avenue to Learn (A2L) course dropbox. No unfinished assignments are permitted. See below for late assignment policy.

1. Face-to-Face Class Attendance and Participation (0%). Students are required 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 Colossians and its contemporary relevance, and it is expected that students will participate in these small group discussions.
2. Reflection Paper (15%). Each student needs to briefly describe how they understand the relevance of Colossians for ministry, theology, and discipleship during the first week of

class. This exercise will be repeated at the end of the semester, with emphasis falling on how the student’s understanding has been changed and refined. The initial reflection paper should be under 600 words and is due on **September 16th (before 11:59pm)**. The second paper should be under 1200 words and is due with the final paper (**December 12th before 11:59pm**). Please note that, while this is an assignment of personal reflection, the idea included in them should be well-organized and clearly presented.

3. Reading and Online Discussion (30%). Although this course is a hybrid course instead of a regular course, it is a collaborative learning effort, and it will employ a discussion forum on the Avenue to Learn course site (A2L). A significant component of this course is online discussion. It is expected that students will actively participate in the online forum by posting *at least one* discussion topic on Avenue to Learn (A2L) discussion forum each week. These posts must include an issue or a question that is related to the assigned passage of the week and *must* include discussion of exegetical aspects, although students may also discuss theological implications and the contemporary significance of the passage. Each week, each student must also *at least respond to two posts* with insightful comments that further the online discussion. Insights can be drawn from their only reading of the text and/or from commentaries. Students are encouraged to post their questions at the beginning of the week in order to give other students some time to formulate their responses. Each week, students will read the commentary of the assigned passage as well as some electronic readings posted by the professor on A2L. Students should indicate on Avenue to Learn whether they have finished the assigned reading for that week. The overall grade for this requirement will be determined by both the student’s reading and his or her participation in the online forum.
4. Reading Response (25%). Students will read the assigned texts (Walsh and Keesmaat) and then submit a written response that answers each of these questions:
  1. Which statements in the book were the most significant to you personally? Select five quotations from the book that made you pause and think, briefly explaining your reasons for each choice.
  2. How has this book deepened your understanding of the meaning and significance of the epistles to the Colossians in Paul’s historical context?
  3. How has this book deepened your understanding of Colossians as a part of the New Testament? Give specific examples.
  4. How has the book deepened your understanding of the relevance of the message of Colossians to the contemporary world? Do you agree with the authors in the way they brought Colossians to bear on society today? Give specific examples.

The answer must be well organized and clearly presented in full paragraphs. The entire report must be at least 1500 words (and no more than 2500) and must follow the “McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses.” Student should come to the face-to-face class (Oct 13–14) having read the book in its entirety and be prepared to contribute to a class discussion. The reading response is due on **October 28th (before 11:59pm)**.

5. Sermon or Teaching Plan (30%). Students are asked to write an exegetical sermon (3000-3500 words) based on a passage in Colossians. Paper Break Down: (1000-1500 words exegetical comment; 2000-2500 words sermon).
- a. The assignment is consisted of two parts. The first part is a 1000-1500 exegetical comment on the selected passage (with at least 10 sources). Students are expected to be able to engage in exegetical analysis of a particular passage. Succinct comment should be made on particular exegetical issues and hermeneutical decisions regarding the selected passage. This part of the assignment has to follow the MDC style guide.
  - b. The second part of the assignment is the teaching/preaching component. It should be equivalent to a 20-30 minute presentation. It should be written in a spoken style, intended to be deliver on the pulpit or in a classroom setting. This part does not have to follow the style guide, but reference to illustrations should be included.
  - c. The teaching project may include a teaching session for a Bible/small group study, a Sunday School course. Note that a teaching project also needs to have an application section.
  - d. A short summary of the real/imagined target audience (demographic background and preaching/teaching setting) as well as a brief description of your homiletic decision are needed.
  - e. Since this course is not a homiletics course, the main purpose of this assignment is not to access each student’s ability to write a good sermon. However, students are expected to be able to work under sound homiletic and teaching principles.
  - f. The purpose of this assignment is to assess the student’s ability to (1) interpret the text of the NT with a theologically and biblically sound hermeneutical method and, (2) apply the message to discipleship, community and ministry formation and presenting it in the contemporary contexts.
  - g. Student Presentations:** Students will give a short presentation of their preliminary ideas for the sermon/teaching ministry project during class (Oct 14). The presentation should be in the form of a sermonette (10 mins max), summarizing the major exegetical issues of the passage and their intended main application/implication(s) of the sermon. Each presentation is followed by a short discussion, which allow students to gain **constructive** criticism in order to improve their work. The goal of this presentation is to facilitates a collaborative learning environment in which instructor and students are engaged in active learning together.

Due Date: **December 12th (11:59pm)**

Grading Summary:

Reflection Paper	15%
Reading and Online Discussion	30%

Thematic Paper	25%
<u>Sermon or Teaching Plan</u>	<u>30%</u>
Total	100%

### TEXTBOOK AND MATERIALS

Students are required to possess the following:

1. An English translation of the New Testament.
2. Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008.
3. Walsh, Brian J. and Sylvia C. Keesmaat. *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004.
4. Supplementary Readings: Provided by the professor on A2L (To be distributed).

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, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3; phone: 416.620.2934; fax: 416.622.2308; email: [books@readon.ca](mailto:books@readon.ca)

Other book services may also carry the texts.

### COURSE SCHEDULE

Dates	Class Topics
Sept 12–16	Welcome Introduction to the Course and to A2L <b>Reflection Paper Due Sept 16 @ 11:59pm</b>
Sept 19–23	The Historical Setting of Colossians The Opponents in Colossians Colossians and other Pauline Letters
Sept 26–30	Letter Opening and Thanksgiving (1:1–8)
Oct 3–7	Paul’s Intercession for the Colossians (1:9–14)
Oct 13 (Face-to-Face)	Reading Response Discussion The Supremacy of Christ (1:15–20) Reconciliation and Perseverance (1:21–23) The Use of Metaphors for the Work of Christ
Oct 14 (Face-to-Face)	Sermon/Teaching Plan Presentation and Discussion Stewardship and Mystery (1:24–2:3)
Oct 17–21	Warning Against False Philosophy (2:4–8) The Remedy—Christ (2:9–15)

Dates	Class Topics
Oct 24–28	Warning Against Legalism (2:16–19) The Remedy—Christ (2:20–3:4) <b>Reading Response Due Oct 28 @ 11:59pm</b>
Oct 31–Nov 4	Put Away the Old Life (3:5–11)
Nov 7–11	Put on the New Self (3:12–17)
Nov 14–18	The Household Code (3:18–4:1)
Nov 21–25	Concluding Exhortations (4:2–6)
Nov 28–Dec 2	Final Greetings and Instructions (4:7–18)
Dec 5–9	The Theology of Colossians Applications
Dec 12	<b>Sermon/Teaching Plan Due</b> <b>Reflection Paper Due</b>

## REFERENCES

Barth, Markus, and Helmut Blanke. *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible Commentary. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.

Bruce, F.F. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984.

Dunn, James D.G. *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.

Garland, David E. *Colossians, Philemon*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998.

Gupta, Nijay. *Colossians*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2013.

Harris, Murray J. *Colossians and Philemon*. Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010.

Lohse, Edward. *Colossians and Philemon*. Hermeneia. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1972.

Lightfoot, J.B. *Colossians and Philemon*. Crossway Classic Commentaries. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997 (1875).

MacDonald, Margaret Y. *Colossians and Ephesians*. Sacra Pagina. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008.

- O'Brien, Peter T. *Colossians, Philemon*. WBC. Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson, 1982.
- Pao, David W. *Colossians and Philemon*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012.
- Seitz, Christopher R. *Colossians*. Brazos Theological Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014.
- Sumney, Jerry L. *Colossians*. NTL. Louisville, Kentucky: WJK, 2008.
- Talbert, Charles H. *Ephesians and Colossians*. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Thompson, Marianne Meye. *Colossians & Philemon*. Two Horizons New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.
- Wall, Robert W. *Colossians & Philemon*. IVP New Testament Commentary. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993. [Available online **for free**: <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/Colossians>]
- Wilson, Robert McLachlan. *Colossians and Philemon*. ICC. New York: T&T Clark, 2005.
- Witherington, Ben. *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Wright, N.T. *Colossians and Philemon*. TNTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989.

## **INTERACTION WITH THE PROFESSOR**

The professor will be available via email, Skype and the Avenue to Learn discussion forum. Students are expected to come to all classes. Extra meetings can be arranged if a student needs to meet outside of office hours (Tuesday, 2-4pm). It is recommended that the student participate regularly in the online discussion forum so as to facilitate the development of a collaborative learning community.

## **CLASSROOM BEHAVIOUR**

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.

### **LATE SUBMISSION POLICY**

All assignments must be submitted on or before the date due, unless other arrangements are made in advance. A late penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all assignments submitted after the deadline, unless an extension has been obtained from the instructor prior to the deadline. Assignments cannot be submitted after **December 19, 2016** without written permission from the Office of the Registrar ([thomn@mcmaster.ca](mailto:thomn@mcmaster.ca)).

### **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 ~ <https://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/programs/rules-regulations>.

In this course we will be using a web-based service ([turnitin.com](http://turnitin.com)) for plagiarism detection. Students who do not wish to submit their work to [turnitin.com](http://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).

### **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.

### **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/mdcstyleguide.pdf>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions.

### **NOTE BENE**

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.