

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

McMaster Divinity College
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Winter 2019
Wednesday 4:00–5:50pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

As all Christian leaders know, churches are hard to deal with—and 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 his Achaian community. By reflecting upon Paul's concerns and the way that he addresses them, we can learn about church leadership and better appreciate the complexities that emerge whenever the proclamation of the kingdom of God produces a community that needs to operate within an existing culture.

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 humble leadership and communal purity/integrity.

Language Option

Students taking this with the biblical language option will be encouraged to practice the responsible use of their existing Greek language skills and will undertake assignments accordingly (see below).

Advanced Elective

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

Through their active participation in this course, students will:

Knowing

- Know the basic outline of 1 Corinthians;
- Have familiarity 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;
- Be sensitive to the historical and cultural environment in which the early church first communicated the gospel;
- Be more competent interpreters of Paul;
- Embody a more 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: You are required to complete all of the following assignments. No unfinished assignments are permitted. *Written assignments must be uploaded to Avenue to Learn either as Word documents (.doc, .docx) or in Rich Text Format (.rtf). A penalty of 2% per day will be applied to all late assignments, including assignments submitted in incorrect file formats. Assignments cannot be submitted after April 10th without written permission from the Office of the Registrar (thomn@mcmaster.ca).*

Assigned Reading & Class Participation (10%)

Each week, you must read a passage of 1 Corinthians and a corresponding portion of Thiselton's commentary (see the "Textbooks" section below). This reading must be completed and reported on Avenue to Learn (A2L) prior to class.

During each class seminar, we will discuss three things: (1) what Paul's words likely meant in their *ancient* social and historical setting; (2) what Paul's message to the Corinthians reveals *in general* about the kingdom of God and the work of the Spirit in individuals and communities; and (3) how the kingdom and the Spirit are manifest (or might be made more manifest) in *contemporary* individuals and communities. I will lecture on (1) and then make some suggestions regarding (2). After a break, small groups will discuss (2). Finally, as a whole class we will formulate some concrete examples of (3).

You are expected to attend all of the face-to-face class seminars and to participate in both small-group and whole-class discussions. In the event that an absence is unavoidable, please make every effort to email me in advance.

Research Groups and Research Bulletins (20% each = 60% total)

The written assignments in this class will consist of a series of reports, each of which will explore a specific passage in 1 Corinthians. These will be submitted by individuals but produced in conversation with small online research groups. The first round of reports will focus on 1 Cor 8:1–9:23. The second round of reports will focus on 1 Cor 9:24–11:1. The third round of reports will focus on 1 Cor 11:17–34.

The reports must be at least 1,500 words in length and must be formatted according to the MDC Style Guide (i.e. standard page layout, appropriate citation formatting, proper spelling, etc.). They do not need to employ a formal essay style but should be written with the structure and style one might expect in a report directed at fellow leaders in a church context (e.g. first-person remarks are acceptable, bullet points can be used where appropriate, etc.). In essence, the idea is that the reports resemble the kind of communication that would be appropriate between the members of a team working to develop some kind of ministry or ministry resource based upon 1 Corinthians. Instead of arguing for narrow theses, the reports should demonstrate *breadth* of research of thinking, along with *careful discrimination* in selecting and using secondary resources (e.g. use the library, use recent resources, be critical when reading on the internet, etc.). The reports should demonstrate that you have taken the time to read widely, to read carefully, and to think deeply (i.e. the report should be something that a committee might receive with confidence as a reliable basis for actual ministry work).

During the first week of class, students will be assigned to a specific research group. They will then work with their group to produce three reports on three assigned passages from 1 Corinthians, including one of each type listed below (with the exception being that language students will produce three language-oriented reports). Each group will have a private space on

A2L in which to share ideas and resources, but each student is responsible for producing his or her own report (i.e. the goal is collaboration, not plagiarism). The reports must be submitted for grading using the appropriate A2L assignment folders, but they must also be posted on the relevant A2L discussion forum so that others in the class can read them. Releasing the reports to the entire class is important, because the reports will build on one another: groups responsible for theological reports will be using the exegetical and linguistic reports, and groups responsible for practical reports will be using the exegetical, linguistic, and theological reports. To allow for this, the due dates will be staggered, with a different group releasing a report each week. A discussion forum will allow you to ask others in the class any questions that you have about their reports.

❖ **Linguistic Research Report (Language Option)**

Students who have selected to take the course with the language option will form a language-focused research group and will produce three linguistic reports. These reports will focus on the lexical and grammatical details of Paul's Greek wordings. You should include descriptions of the various ways that Paul's Greek wordings have been interpreted by commentators, citing at least three of the commentaries listed below that have been marked as useful for Greek study. Special attention should be paid to wordings whose meaning is disputed.

❖ **Exegetical Research Report (BS)**

In keeping with the major emphases of biblical scholarship, the exegetical research reports will situate an assigned passage from 1 Corinthians within its various *ancient contexts*. You must consult (and cite) at least eight of the commentaries listed below (most of which will be on reserve at the library), outlining in a brief report the key things that you have learned about the passage. You should include facts about which scholars agree, as well as issues with respect to which there is disagreement. Where something is disputed, include a brief statement about where you currently stand with regard to issue and why. Be sure not to completely neglect any of the major facets of good exegetical work! By consulting a wide range of commentaries, you should be able to provide comments that explore the passage from text-critical, linguistic, literary, historical, sociological, philosophical, and theological perspectives. Your goal is to help the class to understand both what Paul is saying (i.e. the meaning of his words as language) and what Paul is doing (i.e. the function of his words as historical action).

❖ **Theological Research Report (CC)**

In view of the fact that Christian theology entails much more than simply good exegesis, the theological research groups and reports will reflect on an assigned passage from 1 Corinthians with a view towards the (*re-*)*contextualization* of Paul's theological witness. Your primary task is to consider Paul's witness (both what he says and what he does) and to explore what it reveals about the kingdom of God and the transforming work of the Spirit, keeping in view that Paul wrote in a specific context and that his subsequent

readers inhabit very different social and historical contexts. You must show awareness of the information presented in the exegetical reports produced by other students, but you must also cite a minimum of eight academic sources related to the theological witness of the assigned passage or to the description of relevant cultural contexts. To reflect well, you will need to draw connections between 1 Corinthians and other significant cultural “texts” or “messages” (both biblical and non-biblical, religious and non-religious, written and otherwise); you will need to show how Paul’s witness has been received, (mis)understood, integrated, and even challenged by later readers and reading communities; and you will need to compare Paul’s ideas and actions with those of others (both within the Christian community and outside of it, both in Paul’s own time and today). In the end, your report should not only survey the thoughts of others but should also articulate what you take to be the primary theological significance of Paul’s words and actions. In short, what does Paul’s letter reveal about the kingdom of God? And are his words and actions still a contextually-appropriate witness to that kingdom, or do we need to adaptively re-contextualize his words and actions so that his essential theological witness can be faithfully received and understood by people today?

❖ **Practical Research Report (PS)**

In the end, actions speak louder than words. This being the case, the practical research groups and reports will propose specific, concrete ways that Paul’s theological witness can transform the practices of contemporary individuals and communities. Your report must show that it is informed by the exegetical, linguistic, and theological reports produced by other students, but it must also cite a minimum of eight additional sources related to the practical implications of the assigned passage or to the contemporary practices under consideration. Most importantly, the report should not merely reiterate Paul’s words. Rather, it should propose contemporary words and actions that creatively re-instantiate the most significant aspects Paul’s theological witness, showing how that witness is relevant not only to situations very similar to Paul’s Corinthian mission but also to situations that in various ways look remarkably different.

Final Report and Self-Assessment (30%)

At the conclusion of the semester, each student will write a final report of the type associated with their specialization (see the parenthetical notations above), choosing any one of the following passages: 1 Cor 1:10–2:5; 2:6–4:13; 4:14–6:20; 7:1–40; 11:2–16; 12:1–14:40; 15:1–58. In addition to following the guidelines for the report (see above), you must conclude with some thoughts about how the course has impacted your understanding of 1 Corinthians and its significance for life today. In other words, *how have you grown through the course and where do you see room for future growth?* The final report must be at least 2,000 words and must be submitted prior to **April 10th @ 11:59pm**.

GRADING SUMMARY

Reading and Participation	10%
First-Round Report	20%
Second-Round Report	20%
Third-Round Report	20%
Final Report & Self-Assessment	30%
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, 5 International Blvd, Etobicoke, Ontario M9W 6H3: 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	Primary Reading	Secondary Reading
Jan 9	Welcome & Introduction		
Jan 16	The Historical Setting of 1 Corinthians	16:1–21	Pp. 1–38; 291–303
Jan 23	Sophistication in a Culture of Arrogance	1:10–2:5	Pp. 38–53
Jan 30	Collaboration in a Culture of Competition	2:6–4:13	Pp. 53–77
Feb 6	Purity in an Impure Culture	4:14–6:20	Pp. 77–99
Feb 13	Cultural Institutions in the Shadow of Apocalypse	7:1–40	Pp. 99–122
Feb 20	Reading Week (No Class)		
Feb 27	Self-Sacrifice in a Culture of Rights and Privileges	8:1–9:23	Pp. 122–44

Mar 6	Fear in a Culture of Idolatry	9:24–11:1	Pp. 144–69
Mar 13	Dignity in a Male-Dominated Culture	11:2–16	Pp. 169–79
Mar 20	Solidarity in a Culture of Inequality	11:17–34	Pp. 179–91
Mar 27	Love in a Culture of Self-Promotion	12:1–14:40	Pp. 191–253
Apr 3	Anticipation in a Culture of Instant Gratification	15:1–58	Pp. 253–90
Apr 10	Concluding Discussion		

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

All Students	
Apr 10	Final Report
Language Option Students	
Jan 30	Linguistic Report on 8:1–9:23
Feb 20	Linguistic Report on 9:24–11:1
Mar 13	Linguistic Report on 11:17–34
Group A	
Jan 23	Exegetical Report on 8:1–9:23
Feb 27	Practical Report on 9:24–11:1
Mar 13	Theological Report on 11:17–34
Group B	
Jan 30	Theological Report on 8:1–9:23
Feb 13	Exegetical Report on 9:24–11:1
Mar 20	Practical Report on 11:17–34
Group C	
Feb 6	Practical Report on 8:1–9:23
Feb 20	Theological Report on 9:24–11:1
Mar 6	Exegetical Report on 11:17–34

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

(For additional works, see Thiselton, *A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*, pp. 304–11.)

Grammatical Guides

Brookins, Timothy A., and Bruce W. Longenecker. *1 Corinthians 1–9: A Handbook on the Greek Text*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016.

Brookins, Timothy A., and Bruce W. Longenecker. *1 Corinthians 10–16: A Handbook on the Greek Text*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016.

Ellingworth, Paul and Howard Hatton. *A Handbook on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*. UBS Handbooks. New York: United Bible Societies, 1995.

Commentaries (* indicates discussion of Greek)

Barrett, C. K. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. HNTC. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.

Blomberg, Craig L. *1 Corinthians*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

Bray, Gerald L., ed. *Commentaries on Romans and 1–2 Corinthians*. ACT. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009.

Bruce, F. F. *First and Second Corinthians*. NCB. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971.

Ciampa, Roy E., and Brian S. Rosner. *The First Letter to the Corinthians*. PNTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

*Collins, Raymond. *First Corinthians*. SP. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007.

*Conzelmann, Hans. *1 Corinthians*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975.

*Fee, Gordon. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987. 2nd ed., 2014.

*Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Yale Bible 32. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Gardner, Paul. *1 Corinthians*. ZECNT. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.

*Garland, David E. *1 Corinthians*. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

Harrisville, Roy H. *1 Corinthians*. ACNT. Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1987.

Hays, Richard B. *First Corinthians*. Interpretation. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997.

Horsley, Richard A. *1 Corinthians*. ANTC. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998.

Johnson, Alan F. *1 Corinthians*. IVP NTC 7. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010.

Keener, Craig S. *1–2 Corinthians*. NCBT. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Lockwood, Gregory. *1 Corinthians*. ConcC. St. Louis: Concordia, 2000.

Powers, B. Ward. *First Corinthians: An Exegetical and Explanatory Commentary*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008.

*Robertson, A. T. and Alfred Plummer. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*. ICC. Edinburgh: Clark, 1911.

*Thiselton, Anthony C. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

Witherington, Ben, III. *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

Wright, N. T. *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004.

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

The following guidelines are presented to encourage all students to participate together in this course. They 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 (<https://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/mdcstyleguide.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 its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as the following: NRSV (1989), NCV (1991), TEV/GNB/GNT (1992), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), TNIV (2005), and the Common English Bible (CEB 2011).

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. The binding version of the syllabus is the one posted to Avenue to Learn (A2L).