

**NT 3XP3**  
**Prison Epistles:**  
**A Life Worthy of the Lord**



McMaster Divinity College  
Sept 12–Dec 12  
Monday 4:00pm–5:50pm  
Fall 2018

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

The letters to the Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon are often identified as a sub-corpus within the Pauline epistles. This grouping is not so much based on common content, but rather a similar context of composition, i.e. that Paul wrote these letters during his imprisonment (Eph 3:1, 4:1; Col 4:3, 10; Phlm 1, 9; Phil 1:7, 13–14, etc.). However, the admonition by Paul to “live a life worthy of the Lord” (Col 1:10) is used repeatedly in these letters (“... worthy of the gospel of Christ” Phil 1:27; “... worthy of the calling” Eph 4:1). This seems to suggest that the main concern of Paul in writing these letters is that the churches, in his absence, should collectively strive to live in a manner worthy of the gospel regardless of circumstances. In these letters, Paul encourages his readers to reflect on the many facets of Christian living: to live in unity and to be joyful during times of hardship; to live in concord with the wider society; to live harmoniously within the household; to live with a countercultural manner, that is, to live a cruciform lifestyle that is grounded in the salvific work of the Lord Jesus Christ. As modern readers living in vastly different social and cultural contexts, it is not uncommon to hear people say that we live in society that is materialistic, consumeristic, and obsessed with entertainment. The American Dream seems to be about chasing wealth and comfort for oneself at any cost. The goal of this course then, is to ponder together the question, What does “living a life worthy of the Lord” look like in the contemporary world?

### 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 the prison epistles, as well as scholarly debates concerning the interpretation of the contents.

#### *Pastoral Studies (PS)*

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

#### *Doctor of Practical Theology (DPT)*

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 the historical context and the text of the prison epistles for use in teaching and preaching ministry
- To gain an understanding of problems and issues in the controversial areas of the prison epistles

Being:

- To become competent interpreters of the text
- To become sensitive to the historical and cultural environment of the early church
- To allow the prison epistles to motivate, form and transform our faith, worship and Christian way of life

Doing:

- To develop skills in interpreting the epistles in terms of their theological, historical and social contexts
- To explain key topics and major exegetical issues related to the prison epistles
- To develop and practice responsible exegetical methods that draw upon the varied resources available (commentaries, bible software, etc.)

### **TEXTBOOK AND MATERIALS**

Students are required to possess the following:

1. The English Bible (modern version such as NASB, NRSV or NIV). The Greek New Testament (for those with Greek competence). Students with facility in Greek are encouraged to use their Greek Bible.
2. Porter, Stanley E. *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016.
3. Additional reading materials will be distributed on Avenue to Learn (A2L) prior to the first day of class.

Additional Requirement for students in **Biblical Studies** specialization:

4. Walsh, Brian J. and Sylvia C. Keesmaat. *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004.

Additional Requirement for **6XP6**:

5. Porter, Stanley E. *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*. 2nd ed. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994.
6. A suitable Greek-English lexicon (BDAG, LSJ, Louw-Nida, etc.).

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 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 folder. No unfinished assignments are permitted. See below for late submission policy.

### **Assignment 1: Reflection Paper: 20%.** Due on Sept 14 (11:59pm) and Dec 12th (11:59pm)

Each student needs to briefly describe how they understand the relevance of the prison epistles 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/or refined. The initial reflection paper should be under 600 words and is due on **September 14th (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 papers should be well-organized and clearly presented.

### **Assignment 2: Blog Post and Reading Log: 20%.** Due on Oct 21, Nov 4, Nov 25, Dec 12

We will spend approximately two to three weeks on each epistle (except Philemon) and students are required to post brief comments to A2L (in the format of a blog post) on three passages from the text and the commentary. These are not simply quotations from a commentary but thoughtful reflections on how reading the commentary and participating in the discussion in class has helped you formulate, develop, or refine your understanding of particular passages. The purpose of these blogs is to help students to keep up with the reading as well as to document what they have learned. These posts will only be visible to the professor and they are meant to be a personal (and semi-private) reflection. The final grade for the blog will be based primarily on the quality of its personal reflection, but some consideration will also be given to whether or not it shows awareness of the two-step hermeneutical method (exegesis-application), which will be introduced in class early on.

Students are expected to read the assigned readings (textbook and articles uploaded to A2L), attend class and participate in class discussions. Students are also required to read through the text with the help of a good commentary on the passages covered in class. A reading log, indicating completion of (or a percentage of) the assigned reading must be submitted to A2L by the last day of class.

Blog Post Due Dates: **October 21th; November 4th; November 25th at 11:59pm**  
 Reading Log Due Date: **December 12th at 11:59pm**

<b>Assignment 3: Specialization Paper: 20%. Due on Oct 14 at 11:59pm</b>
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Students will complete one of the following assignments according to their specialization:

Biblical Studies (BS) Focus (**Book Report**):

Students will read the assigned text *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Walsh and Keesmaat) and then submit a written response that answers each of these questions (NB: The answer must be well organized and clearly presented in full paragraphs):

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.

Pastoral Studies (PS) Focus (**Film Analysis**):

Students will watch the movie *Paul, the Apostle of Christ* (Affirm Films, 2018) and then submit a written response, critically analyzing the movie in terms of its portrayal of Scripture. Student should consider the implications of characterization, historical accuracy, and theological themes. In particular, focus on how the movie characterizes Paul during his times in prison and how this affects your reading of the prison epistles. Students should also comment on the purpose of this movie and how they think it should/could be used in a church community (evangelical tool, bible study group, Sunday School, etc.). Comments on the quality of the film should be kept to a minimum unless relevant to the discussion in the paper. The film should be widely available in June, 2018. The instructor will have a copy of the DVD for students to borrow. The entire report should be around **5-6 pages** (and no more than 2000 words) and must follow the "McMaster Divinity College Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses."

<b>Assignment 4: Final Written Assignment: 40%. Due on Dec 12 at 11:59pm</b>
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Students will prepare a research paper of 4000 words. At least 10 academic secondary sources are required for these papers, and all must be used and cited in the paper. Sources may include monographs, commentaries, and articles from journals and books. Sources must NOT include web sites (e.g. blog posts), one volume Bible dictionaries, study Bibles, Bible translations, and

dated devotional commentaries. Note, however, that Pastoral studies students may wish to use relevant websites as additional resources that illustrate application issues.

Biblical Studies (BS) Specialization: Exegetical Paper

Students will select one self-contained passage and complete an exegetical analysis. This paper must follow the *MDC Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses*. For those who have never written an exegetical paper, a step-by-step guide will be provided at the first day of class. Additional tutorial session can also be arranged to discuss the requirement for this paper. The paper should include:

- i. A clear statement of the thesis in the introduction
- ii. The historical and cultural contexts of the passage
- iii. Justification of text boundaries and explanation of how this passage fits within the overall argument of the text
- iv. A detailed (verse-by-verse) exegesis of the entire passage
- v. Theological reflections on the passage (either integrate with your exegesis or at the end of your paper)
- vi. A clear conclusion

Pastoral Studies (PS) Specialization: Exegetical Sermon

Students are asked to write an exegetical sermon (4000 words) based on a passage in the prison epistles. The assignment will consist of two parts (1000–1500 words exegetical comment; 2500–3000 words sermon):

- i. The first part is a 1000-1500 exegetical comment on the selected passage. Students are expected to be able to engage in exegetical analysis. Succinct comments 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.*
- ii. The second part of the assignment is the teaching/preaching component. It should be equivalent to a 20-30 minute presentation. It can be written in a spoken style, intended to be delivered on the pulpit. This part does not have to follow the style guide, but references to sources (e.g. for illustrations) should be included.
- iii. A short summary of the real/imagined target audience (demographic background and settings) as well as a brief description of your homiletic decision are needed.
- iv. Since this course is not a homiletics course, the main purpose of this assignment is not to assess each student's ability to write a good sermon. However, students are expected to be able to work under sound homiletic and teaching principles.
- v. 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.

Student Presentations (for ALL specializations):

Students will give a short presentation of their preliminary ideas for the written assignment during the second last class (**Dec 3**). The presentation should summarize the major exegetical issues of the passage(s) and the main application/implication(s) of the paper. Each presentation will be followed by a short discussion, which will allow students to gain **constructive** criticism in order to improve their work. The goal of this presentation is to facilitate a collaborative learning environment in which instructor and students are engaged in active learning together.

**Greek Assignment: Translation and Exegetical Note: 20% (3-level) and 40% (6-level).**  
 Due on Oct 21, Nov 4, Nov 25

Requirements for students taking this course with the Greek option (please convey this to Student Records:

1. MDiv or MTS students taking this course with the Greek option need to complete three translation and exegetical exercises on three passages assigned by the instructor **INSTEAD OF** the blog posts. These three assignments are due on Oct 21, Nov 4 and Nov 25.
2. Students taking this course as a 6-level Greek exegesis course (MA/PhD) need to complete a weekly translation and exegetical exercise **INSTEAD OF** the blog posts (#2 above) and specialization paper (#3 above). Students will examine an assigned passage each week (starting from the third week, for eight weeks) and then prepare both exegetical notes and an English translation. A template for the weekly exegetical assignment will be sent to all students before the first week of class. These assignments are due on or **before 10:00am on the day of our scheduled meeting day**, according to the schedule below.

Paper Due Date: **Dec 12 at 11:59pm** (Late papers will not be accepted after Dec 16)

Grading Summary and Due Date (**3-level**):

Reflection Paper	20%	Sept 14; Dec 12
Blog Posts/Translation and Reading Log	20%	Oct 21; Nov 4; Nov 25; Dec 12
Specialization Paper	20%	Oct 14
<u>Final Written Assignment</u>	<u>40%</u>	Dec 12
Total	100%	

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Grading Summary and Due Date (**6-level**):

Reflection Paper	20%	Sept 14; Dec 12
Translation and Exegetical Note	40%	From Oct 1 to Nov 26 (Except Oct 8)
<u>Final Written Assignment</u>	<u>40%</u>	Dec 12
Total	100%	

## SCHEDULE

Dates	Class Topics	Reading
Sept 10	Course Introduction, Syllabus Two-Step Hermeneutical Approach/The “Pauline” Structure <b>Reflection Paper Due Sept 14@11:59pm</b>	Articles @A2L
Sept 17	The Historical and Cultural Contexts of the Epistles Paul’s Imprisonments Issues with Historical Reconstruction	<i>Apostle Paul</i> , 3–94
Sept 24	The Letter Genre: Opening, Thanksgiving, and Prayer (Phlm 1–7; Phil 1:1–11; Col 1:1–8; Eph 1:1–23)	<i>Apostle Paul</i> , 136–184
Oct 1	Philippians, the Opponents, and the Letter Genre The “Hymns” of Christ (Phil 2:5–11; Col 1:15–20)	<i>Apostle Paul</i> , 329–54
Oct 8	READING WEEK (No Class) <b>Specialization Paper Due Oct 14@11:59pm</b>	
Oct 15	Cruciformity and Eschatology in Philippians The Purpose and Application of Philippians <b>First Blog Post/Translation Due Before Oct 21@11:59pm</b>	Articles @A2L
Oct 22	The “Indicative” in Colossians: The Supremacy of Christ	<i>Apostle Paul</i> , 354–75
Oct 29	The “Imperative” in Colossians: New Life in Christ <b>Second Blog Post/Translation Due Before Nov 4@11:59pm</b>	Articles @A2L
Nov 5	The “Indicative” in Ephesians (Eph 1–3) The “Problem(s)” of the Church	<i>Apostle Paul</i> , 384–404
Nov 12	The “Imperative” in Ephesians (Eph 4–6) The Purpose of Ephesians	
Nov 19	The Pauline Household Code (Col 3:18–4:1 and Eph 5:21b–6:9) Application: Ephesians <b>Third Blog Post/Translation Due Before Nov 25@11:59pm</b>	Articles @A2L
Nov 26	The Purpose of Philemon Philemon and the Issue of Slavery	<i>Apostle Paul</i> , 375–84
Dec 3	The Theology of the Prison Epistles <b>Paper Outline Presentations</b>	
Dec 10	Conclusion: Major Themes in the Prison Epistles Towards a Cruciform Lifestyle <b>Final Written Assignment, Reflection Paper, Reading Log Due Dec 12@11:59pm</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.
- Best, Ernest. *Ephesians*. ICC. New York: T&T Clark, 1998.
- Bockmuehl, Markus. *The Epistle to the Philippians*. Black's New Testament Commentary. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998.
- Bruce, F.F. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984.
- Carson, D.A. *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996.
- Cohick, Lynn. *Philippians*. The Story of God Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013.
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- Dunn, James D.G. *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.
- Fee, Gordon D. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. NICNT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995.
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## 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 **Dec 16, 2018** 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](https://www.turnitin.com)) for plagiarism detection. Students who do not wish to submit their work to [turnitin.com](https://www.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 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).

**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.