

HDS 1544x.1-3
The Letters of the Apostle Paul

There is no Christ outside Saint Paul. Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 2.

Teaching Staff:

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Course description

The letters of Paul are the earliest texts in the Christian scriptures, written by a Jew at a time when the word “Christian” hadn’t yet been coined. What is the religious and political context into which they emerged? How were they first interpreted? How and why do they make such an enormous impact in Christian communities and in politics today?

Archaeological materials and ancient writings will help you to enter the ancient Mediterranean world and to think about religious groups, power, poverty, health, and the lives of elites and slaves in the Roman Empire. We’ll explore how controversial and important these letters were in the ancient world and for understanding the ancient world. We’ll also spend some time thinking about how these letters still make a tremendous impact today.

Whether you’ve been studying Paul’s letters for years or are merely curious about what Christian scriptures are, this course will provide you with information to deepen your understanding of the ancient contexts and present-day controversies about these texts.

Course Objectives

- 1) To investigate the Pauline correspondence as a record of struggle and debate over key social, political, ethical, and theological or religious issues.
- 2) To learn about the Roman Empire in which the Pauline correspondence was penned.
- 3) To understand what is at stake in various scholars’ approaches to Paul’s letters.
- 4) To come to your own understanding of what the Pauline correspondence reveals about first-century debates about key issues, and to take responsibility for your interpretations.

- 5) To engage ancient texts with *disciplined intimacy*, understanding that these texts are both strange to our world and intimate to it. This disciplined intimacy involves learning and practicing close reading, as well as placing texts within their social, political, cultural contexts.

Course Expectations:

This course will run for six weeks, from 6 January 2014 to 5 February 2014. Participants seeking a certificate of completion should complete the course materials and assignments. This might include, but is not limited to, watching video lectures, reading texts, engaging in annotation assignments, and participating in discussion forums.

Students who cannot complete all of the course materials and assignments are welcome and encouraged to audit this class by engaging with the course materials to the extent that they can.

All content for a given week will be released by 5 PM Eastern Standard Time (EST) on the day indicated on the syllabus.

Readings:

Course readings will be made available through a HarvardX collaboration with poetrygenius.com. Additional or extended readings will also be available on that website. Please complete the readings for the day before watching that day's videos, unless otherwise noted.

Questions:

All questions should be made on the FAQ Discussion Thread. We apologize, but given the possibility of many queries, emails or tweets sent directly to the course teaching staff will not be answered.

SYLLABUS OF READINGS

We recommend that you read the New Testament texts in the New Revised Standard Version (which will be provided for you). You may use any translation is fine, but remember to check now and then and to notice differences between your translation and the NRSV.

6 January 2014 Day 1: Welcome and Introduction

Letter to Philemon

MODULE 1: WRITING AND LETTERS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

8 January 2014 Day 2: What are the letters of Paul?

Letter to Philemon (again)

The prescripts to Paul's letters

10 January 2014 Day 3: The Historical Context of Letter-Writing

Romans 16

"Letter from a boy" (*P. oxy.* 119)

Letter of Isias to Hephastion

13 January 2014 Day 4: Rhetoric in the Ancient World. . . and today

Galatians, especially 1:1-3:1

Romans 1:1-17

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter From Birmingham Jail*

MODULE 2: CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES AND THE ROMAN WORLD

15 January 2014 Day 5: Canon, Part I: What were some ancient responses to Paul's letters as scripture or authoritative?

1 Cor. 15:1-11; Galatians 1-2; Philippians 3; 2 Peter 3:15-16

Athanasius *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter*

Eusebius *History of the Church* 3.25.1-7

Wayne Meeks and John Fitzgerald, eds., *The Writings of St. Paul* (2d ed.; New York: Norton, 2007) 228-235, 285. © This includes:

"Ascents of James" (Epiphanius, *Pan. haer.* 30.16.6-9)

The Cerinthians (ibid., 28.5.1-3)

"Letter of Peter to James" (*Kerygmata Petrou* selections)

Selections of *Pseudo Clementine Literature*

Irenaeus *Against the heresies* 1.41.1 on Marcion (p. 285)

17 January 2014 Day 6: Canon, Part 2: What are some modern responses to Paul's letters as scripture or authoritative?

1 Cor. 7:12; 1 Cor. 7:25

Howard Thurman, interview <http://www.nathanielturner.com/racialrootsandreligion.htm>
(read response to the first question)

Stendahl, Why I Love the Bible, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*

A New New Testament. “Forward” by John Dominic Crossan
A New New Testament. “Introducing *A New New Testament*” by Hal Taussig
F. F. Bruce, “Tradition and the Canon of Scripture,” 59, 69-74 (in *The Authoritative Word*)

20 January 2014 Day 7: A Succession of Empires and Roman Imperial Power

Polybius *Histories* Book 1.1.2-2.8 and 1.4.1-11.

Daniel 2

1 Corinthians 10-12

22 January 2014 Day 8: Roman Imperialism and Jewish Diversity

Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.119-166; 2.254-270

Josephus *Antiquities* 18.1

24 January 2014 Webchat

27 January 2014 Day 9: The Roman Empire: Politics and Religion

“Letter of Paulus Fabius Maximus and Decrees by Asians Concerning the Provincial Calendar,” in Frederick W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis, MO: Clayton, 1982) reading 33 (pp. 215-224; Priene inscription)

Tacitus, *Histories* 4.81 and John 9:1-13

1 Corinthians 1-4

Romans 13

MODULE 3: 1 CORINTHIANS

29 January 2014 Day 10: Introduction to 1 Corinthians and Slavery and Freedom in Roman Corinth

1 and 2 Corinthians

Aristotle, *Politics* I.1-13 (1252a-1260b)

Justinian *Digest* 21

31 January 2014 Day 11: Wisdom, Prophecy, Knowledge in 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians

Galatians 3-4

2 Corinthians 10-12

The Wisdom of Solomon

3 February 2013 Day 12: Early Christian Communities Interpret 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians

Aristotle, *Politics* I.1-13 (1252a-1260b)

1 Timothy (esp. chapters 2-3), Colossians 2:20-4:1; Ephesians 5:21-6:20

Acts of Paul and Thecla

Tertullian *On baptism* 17

5 February 2013 Day 13: Conclusions