

**Syllabus for
CHRISTOLOGICAL EPISTLES
NTL675**

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I. Catalogue Description and Course Objectives

Catalogue Description: Particular attention to the Christology of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Problems of authenticity will be considered. (*Prerequisite: BIB550 or equivalent.*)

Enlarged Description: This course will consist of a careful study of major passages in these epistles in their socio-historical, literary/rhetorical, and theological dimensions. **The classroom discussion will focus primarily on Philippians and Colossians.** Special attention will be paid to the way Paul attempts to use his Christological convictions to shape the epistles' audiences into ecclesial communities whose life together reflects these convictions.

Objectives: Upon successful completion of the course you will have (R= Requirement related to fulfilling objective):

1. Demonstrated a basic grasp of the content and theology of Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians (All requirements).
2. Demonstrated a rudimentary understanding of the socio-historical, rhetorical, inter-textual/canonical backgrounds against which they might be best understood (R2, R3, R4, R5).
3. Demonstrated an ability to articulate how the Christological affirmations in these three epistles shape other theological topics, e.g. soteriology, ecclesiology, etc. (R5, R6).
4. Demonstrated an ability to exercise creative theological imagination by reflecting on how the theology of these letters might be embodied in a local church body given the particular challenges facing the Church in North America (R3, R4, R6).
5. Demonstrated an ability to utilize responsibly a passage or passages from these epistles in an ecclesial setting i.e., most probably teaching or preaching in a local church or para-church setting (R4).

II. Required Textbooks

Fowl, Stephen E. *Philippians in The Two Horizons NT Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

Longenecker, Bruce. *The Lost Letters of Pergamum*. Grand Rapids, Baker, 2003.

Talbert, Charles H. *Ephesians and Colossians* in Paideia Commentaries on the NT. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007.

Thompson, Marianne Meye. *Colossians & Philemon* in The Two Horizons NT Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

Walsh, Brian J. and Sylvia C. Keesmaat. *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004.

III. Helpful Websites

<http://www.ntgateway.com/paul/>

This is the Paul section of the NT Gateway site. It is one of the best sites on the Web for generally reliable information on Paul and the rest of NT studies.

<http://www.luthersem.edu/ckoester/Paul/Main.htm>

Journeys of Paul, by Craig Koester. Clearly presented and nicely illustrated pictures of Philippi and Ephesus.

IV. Requirements: All assignments that are to be posted into Moodle are due at 11:55 PM, CST (subject to change at my discretion).

Note: Most of the assignments below involve using the online classroom software, Moodle, in some way. To find out how to complete the task the assignment asks you to do, go into the Moodle website at <http://Moodle.nts.edu>. Sign in by using the user name and password sent to you by the IT department here at NTS. (If you do not have a user name and password, email support@NTS.edu immediately and they will send them to you.) From there, click on “Support” in the menu bar at the top of the page. Next, click on “Student Frequently Asked Questions.” In this resource you should be able to find instructions on any task that you will be required to do.

1. Reading the Epistles. You must read Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians through at least 7 times during this course. You must read each epistle in one sitting and report that you have read each one of them in full for each of the due dates listed in the Schedule of Assignments below. By the due date/time of the reading, you must have posted a statement in the Reading Epistles Forum in Moodle saying that you have completed that due date’s reading of the three epistles. Each reading counts 1% points toward your final grade, making all seven readings count 7% your final grade. **You cannot “make up” any of this reading. You can only get credit for what you actually read by the due date listed on the Schedule of Assignments below. Because these are basically “give away” points, this is an all or nothing assignment. You do not get credit for partial reading.**

****Note Carefully**** To save time, as you read each epistle, you should keep a running master list of *critical* questions and insights of comprehensive or theological significance that arise from a careful reading of the text. These questions and comments should not only note the scriptural context of the

concern, but what matter of importance is at stake. These questions will later become a part of requirement 5 described below.

2. **Longenecker Reflection Paper:** Read Bruce Longenecker's novel, *The Lost Letters of Pergamum*. Then read Philippians carefully (this will count as your first reading of Philippians). Assume for now that Longenecker's historical novel captures the socio-historical, cultural, and especially the **political and social** feel of the first century setting in which Philippians would have been first heard. Write a 750-1,000 word (3-4 pages) paper, typed, and double-spaced, answering the following question: How does understanding Philippians in light of this background change the way I read it? Give **specific examples from the text of Philippians** which sound different to you after reading Longenecker and **explain why they now sound different**. This paper counts for 10% of your final grade. You will submit your paper in Moodle within the Assignments topic area. Under Assignments click the appropriate link for "Longenecker Paper." On the screen that appears click the **Browse** button, select your file, click **Open**, and then click **Upload this file**. Your assignment must be uploaded as an MS Word file by 11:55 PM, Friday, May 15.

3. **Fishbowl on Walsh and Keesmaat.** You will actively participate in a "fishbowl" discussion of Walsh and Keesmaat. It will consist of a class discussion/critical analysis of the book. **I will not simply give these points away because you show up in class that day.** You must make regular contributions during this discussion period in a way that demonstrates an understanding of, **and a critical engagement with**, the assigned book. Your participation in this fishbowl is worth 7.5% of your final grade. It will be held on Tuesday, May 26. Depending on how many students are in the class, I may split the class in parts with parts of the class discussing sections of the book. If this happens, you will not know which part of the reading you will be assigned to discuss. **In any case, you are responsible for all of the assigned reading.** Hence, you should carefully read the whole book and take careful notes on it (in some form or fashion) or even bring a summary of it to refer to during the discussion.

I will attempt to focus the discussions by asking at least two of the following three questions: (1) What is the main thesis/purpose of particular chapters in the book? (2) How do the authors argue their overall case? (3) What are the ramifications for our theology (including Christology, ecclesiology, etc.) if their arguments are taken seriously? (4) What are the pastoral ramifications of their argument(s) for engaging in Christian formation in the church of North America?

4. **"In Ministry" Assignment.** During the semester, you will teach or preach from a passage or passages from these three epistles. You could do this in a local church setting (e.g., preaching, teaching a Sunday School class, a Bible study, etc.) or a para-church setting (e.g., preaching at the Kansas City Rescue Mission, leading a Bible study at the KC Urban Youth Center, etc.). Whatever setting you choose, you must ask someone (preferably a pastor, a person in charge, someone with theological training who is not currently an NTS student, or a professional type person) to fill out an evaluation form and sign it. **I must approve the person you**

plan to ask ahead of time. I will use that person's evaluation of your presentation as well as your written sermon, notes, lesson plan, etc. to evaluate this assignment. It will be worth 7.5% of your final grade. It can be done any time **after May 29** but it must be completed with the evaluation and your written materials in my mailbox at NTS **by no later than Friday, August 7 at 4:30 PM.**

5. Critical Reading Responses (CRR) to the epistles, Fowl, Thompson, Talbert.

You will prepare three critical reading responses of **1,500-2,500 words** each in which you critically engage each epistle and the commentary reading associated with it. You will be penalized for having significantly more or less words than the lower and upper limits. For the specific content and due dates of these CRR's, see the Class and Assignment Schedule below.

These responses should have two sections: (1) *Critical* questions and insights of comprehensive or theological significance that arise from a careful reading of each epistle itself **prior to** reading the selections from the commentaries. These questions and comments should not only note the scriptural context of the concern, but what matter of importance is at stake. These questions should be an **edited version** of your running master list of *critical* questions and insights that you generated during your prior readings of the epistle. (2) *Critical* questions and observations that your reading of Fowl/Thompson/Talbert raises in your mind about the biblical text and/or vice-versa, critical questions and observations that reading the biblical text raises in your mind about your reading of these commentaries. An example of an "A" quality CRR will be available in Moodle in the Course Resources topic area. It will be called "Model CRR."

You will submit your CRR's in Moodle within the Assignments topic area. Under Assignments click the appropriate link for the particular CRR you are submitting (e.g., CRR1, CRR2 or CRR3). On the screen that appears click the **Browse** button, select your file, click **Open**, and then click **Upload this file**. CRR1 (Philippians) must be uploaded as an MS Word file by 11:55 PM on Friday May 22, CRR2 (Colossians) by 11:55 PM on Friday, May 29 and CRR3 (Ephesians) by 11:55 PM on Friday, August 7. Each CRR will constitute 8% of your final grade making them worth 24% of your final grade. My assistant may be grading your CRRs.

6. Take-home Essay/Research Paper. You will write a take-home essay on a question (or questions) that will be distributed the last day of class. If I approve it, you may write a research paper on some aspect of the interpretation of these epistles instead. The approximate length of the take-home essay should be 3,000-5,000 words and the research paper should be approximately 5,000-6000. This assignment will constitute 44% of your final grade. You will submit your Essay/Paper in Moodle within the Assignments topic area. Under Assignments click the appropriate link for "Essay/Paper." On the screen that appears click the **Browse** button, select your file, click **Open**, and then click **Upload this file**. Your essay/paper must be uploaded as an MS Word file by 11:55 PM on Friday, August 7.

The take-home essay will be a question (or questions) related to the interpretation of these epistles and the ministry implications of the material we've covered in class and in the reading. Hence, to answer it, you will creatively draw on your class notes, all your course reading, and on your own theological reflections in the context of a ministry situation.

Unless you will have access to the NTS library or another equivalent theological library, you should **not** consider writing the research paper. As a research paper, it clearly **requires additional research over and above your class resources**. I must approve not only your doing it but also your **topic by no later than Friday, June 19**.

As general guidelines for the research paper, follow the instructions given by Joel Green in the document, "Some Comments on Research Papers." It is located in Moodle in the Course Resources topic area. **I will assume you have read and followed Green's directions when I grade your paper**. Note carefully: You should begin your research paper with a thesis statement that explicitly states the thesis you intend to argue and return to that thesis statement in your conclusion. While the paper should generally follow Turabian style, you may consult the *SBL Handbook of Style* for proper form for footnotes, abbreviations, etc. You may also use the document entitled "Ripples and Luke 24HBT.doc" located in Moodle in the Course Resources topic areas as a general guide as to how this paper should look in terms of footnotes and style.

V. Summary of Grading Policy

A Word about Grading: Evaluation in this kind of course, by its very nature, involves an element of subjectivity. It involves someone who is an expert in the field making a judgment on the kind of work you produce. That is a part of what you are paying for in this class. The primary factors I take into account in assessing "good solid graduate work," the sort of work to which I assign a "B" are (1) ability to demonstrate a breadth and depth of understanding of the material engaged; (2) ability to engage this material **in a critical way**; (3) ability to exhibit how the material is related to a larger theological and ecclesial context. If you demonstrate a **consistent** ability to do these things in all your coursework, you can expect to receive a B. If you demonstrate consistent ability to do them **incisively and with excellence**, you can expect to receive an A. If you demonstrate an ability to do these things **often, but not consistently**, you can expect to receive a C. (Hence, I assume that a C means "average," or "satisfactory" work. It does **not** mean "bad" or "unsatisfactory.") If you **seldom** demonstrate an ability to do these things, you can expect to receive a D.

The final grade will be computed using the following percentage scale.

7%	Reading the Epistles
10%	Longenecker Reflection Paper
7.5%	Fishbowl
7.5%	“In Ministry” Assignment
24%	Critical Reading Responses
44%	Take-home Essay/Research Paper

The following percentage scale will determine letter grades:

A	100-90%
B	89-80%
C	79-70%
D	69-60%
F	59-0%

VI. Class and Assignment Schedule: All assignments that must be submitted in Moodle are due at 11:55PM CST unless otherwise noted. (Subject to change at my discretion)

Date	Class Topic	Assignments Due
05/11		Epistle Reading 1
05/15		1. Epistle Reading 2 2. Longenecker Paper
05/18	Philippians	
05/19	Philippians	Epistle Reading 3
05/20	Philippians	
05/21	Philippians/Theological Synthesis (Fowl, 205-235)	
05/22	Pastor Brad Estep on Preaching the Epistles	CRR1: Philippians (Fowl, pp. 1-203)
05/26	Colossians	Walsh and Keesmatt Fish Bowl
05/27	Colossians	Epistle Reading 4
05/28	Colossians	
05/29	Colossians/Theological Synthesis (Thompson, 111-191)	CRR2: Colossians (Thompson, 1-109)
06/19		Last day for research paper topic to be approved if you're doing a research paper
08/07		1. Epistle Readings 5, 6, 7 Due 2. CRR3: Ephesians (Talbert, 3-172) Due 3. “In Ministry” Assignment Due 4. Final Exam/Research Paper Due