

**Syllabus for
THE EPISTLES TO THE THESSALONIANS
NTL676**

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I. Catalogue Description and Course Objectives

Catalogue Description: Against a background study of the literary character of the Epistles, the course will trace their flow of thought, with closer attention to passages of particular doctrinal significance (*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. Special attention will be paid to the way the letters shape their audience with regard to ecclesiology, eschatology, and holiness.

Objectives: Upon successful completion of the course you will have:

1. Demonstrated a basic grasp of the content and theology of 1 & 2 Thessalonians (Requirements 1, 2, 3, 5, 6).
2. Demonstrated a rudimentary understanding of the socio-historical, rhetorical, inter-textual/canonical backgrounds against which they might be best understood (Requirements 2, 3, 5, 6).
3. Demonstrated an ability to engage in disciplined group discussion characterized by critical theological reflection on the biblical text and secondary sources (Requirements 3 & 4).
4. Demonstrated an ability to exercise disciplined biblical interpretation and creative theological imagination by writing an essay that requires you to synthesize class lectures, class reading, theological reflection, and ministry context (Requirement 6).

II. Required Textbooks (Other material will be made available through Blackboard or the NTS library.)

Beale, G. K. *1-2 Thessalonians* in The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Downers Grove: IVP, 2003.

Donfried, Karl P. and I. Howard Marshall. *The Theology of the Shorter Pauline Letters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. *First and Second Thessalonians* in Interpretation. Louisville: John Knox, 1998.

Harink, Douglas. *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003.

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

Pagitt, Doug. *Church Re-Imagined: The Spiritual Formation of People in Communities of Faith*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

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 with a few pictures of Thessalonica.

IV. Requirements

Note: Some of the assignments below involve using the online classroom software, Blackboard. To find out how to complete the task the assignment asks you to do, go into the Blackboard website at <http://blackboard.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 blackboard@NTS.edu immediately and they will send them to you.) From there, click on the “Help” button in the blue space at the top of the page. Next, click on “Online Blackboard Student Manual.” In this manual you should be able to find instructions on any task that you will be required to do.

1. Reading the Epistles. You must read 1 & 2 Thessalonians through at least 10 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 of the reading, you must have posted a statement in the Reading Epistles Forum in Blackboard saying that you have completed that due date’s reading of the two epistles. Each reading counts 10 points toward your final grade, making all ten readings count 100 points toward 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 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 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 short novel, *The Lost Letters of Pergamum*. Then read 1 & 2 Thessalonians carefully (this will count as your second reading of 1 & 2 Thessalonians). Assume for now that Longenecker’s historical novel captures the socio-historical, cultural, and especially the **political** feel of the first century setting in which Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians 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 1 & 2

Thessalonians in light of this background affect the way one should read these epistles? **Give specific examples from the text of the epistles which sound different to you after reading Longenecker and explain why they now sound different.** You may earn up to 110 points for this essay. To submit your paper, go into the Assignments Tab in Blackboard to the Longenecker Paper assignment. Click on View/Complete Assignment at the bottom of the description. Then upload your assignment as an MS Word file by 11:00 PM on Monday, September 18.

3. **Fishbowl Discussion of Douglas Harink's, *Paul among the Postliberals*.** You may earn up to 90 points by actively participating in a "fishbowl" discussion of Harink. The "fishbowl" will consist of a seminar type whole class group discussion/critical analysis of this 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 book. I will provide you with questions to help you focus your reading. They will be located in Blackboard under the Course Documents tab in the Guidelines Folder and will be called "Fishbowl Focus Questions." I would strongly encourage you to take notes on your reading or even to bring a summary of each chapter in the book to refer to during the discussion. This discussion will occur in the first class session on September 26 and will last 1-2 hours.
4. **Threaded Blackboard Discussion of Pagitt.** You may earn up to 80 points by participating in a threaded discussion of *Church Re-Imagined* throughout the semester. You will be assigned to a group and will participate in this discussion via Blackboard. The book has ten chapters and the discussion for each chapter will take place over a one week period in your group folder. You should read the chapter early in the week so that you have ample time to engage your group members in discussion. After reading the chapter, you should make an immediate post about a paragraph long with an initial reaction to what you read in your group discussion forum. You should also make at least one post in response to the reactions/posts of others. I will assign points at the end of the semester based on the quantity and quality of your participation. Mike King will be monitoring these discussions and responding at times to your questions about issues involving the emergent church movement. See the Schedule of Assignments below for the due dates of your postings.
5. **Critical Reading Responses (CRR) to Commentary Reading.** You will prepare a critical reading response of **4-6 pages** for each epistle and the reading assignments by Beale, Donfried, and Gaventa (abbreviated below as BD&G) associated with them. The specific content of the 1 Thessalonians reading assignment includes: (1) 1 Thessalonians; (2) Beale, 13-178; (3) Donfried, 3-79; (4) Gaventa, 1-88. The specific content of the 2 Thessalonians reading assignment includes: (1) 2 Thessalonians; (2) Beale, 179-269; (3) Donfried, 83-113; (4) Gaventa, 89-133.

These responses should have three sections: (1) *Critical* questions and insights of comprehensive or theological significance that arise from a careful reading of the epistle text itself **prior to** reading the selections from BD&G. 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 come from your (abbreviated or modified) running master list referred to under requirement 1 above. (2) *Critical* questions and observations that your reading of BD&G 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 the claims of BD&G. (3) A comparative section noting any significant disagreements or inconsistencies between BD&G as to how they address these critical issues. An example of an “A” quality CRR will be available for you under the Course Documents tab in Blackboard. It will be called “Model CRR.”

To submit your assignments, go into the Assignments Tab in Blackboard to the CRR 1 or 2 assignment. Click on View/Complete Assignment at the bottom of the description. Then upload your assignment as an MS Word file. Submit each CRR by no later than 11:00 PM CST on the dates listed on the Schedule of Assignments below. You may earn up to 110 points for each CRR making them worth a total of 220 points. My assistant, David Young, will be grading your CRRs.

- 6. Synthetic Essay.** You will write one synthetic essay (approximately 3,000-5,000 words). To write it, you will need to utilize the biblical text (esp. 1 & 2 Thessalonians), the material we covered in class, the assigned reading for the class, and possibly a few other essays on reserve in the NTS library. In addition, you will need to exercise your informed theological imagination. You may earn up to 400 points for this assignment. To submit your essay/paper, go into the Assignments Tab in Blackboard to the Final Exam assignment. Click on View/Complete Assignment at the bottom of the description. Then upload your assignment as an MS Word file. Submit your Final Exam by 11:00 PM CST on Monday, December 11.

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 point scale. There are 1,000 possible points.

100 points	Reading the Epistles
110 points	Longenecker Reflection Paper
90 points	Fishbowl on Harink
80 points	Threaded Blackboard Discussion of Pagitt
220 points	Critical Reading Responses
400 points	Synthetic Essay

The following point scale will determine letter grades:

A	1,000-900
B	899-800
C	799-700
D	699-600
F	599-0

VI. Schedule of Assignments: Unless otherwise noted, each reading of the epistles is due to be posted into Blackboard by class time on the date listed below. (Note: Due dates are subject to change at my discretion.)

Date	Assignment Due
09/14	1 st reading of Epistles due to be posted into Blackboard by 11:00 PM
09/18	Longenecker Reflection Paper due to be posted into Blackboard by 11:00 PM
09/19	2 nd reading of Epistles
09/26	Harink Fishbowl Pagitt chapter 1 postings end at class time
10/03	3 rd reading of Epistles Pagitt chapter 2 postings end at class time
10/10	4 th reading of Epistles Pagitt chapter 3 postings end at class time
10/24	5 th reading of Epistles Pagitt chapter 4 postings end at class time
10/31	1 Thessalonians CRR due to be posted into Blackboard by 11:00 PM Pagitt chapter 5 postings end at class time
11/07	6 th reading of Epistles Pagitt chapter 6 postings end at class time
11/14	7 th reading of Epistles Pagitt chapter 7 postings end at class time
11/21	8 th reading of Epistles Pagitt chapter 8 postings end at class time
11/28	9 th reading of Epistles 2 Thessalonians CRR due to be posted into Blackboard by 11:00 PM Pagitt chapter 9 postings end at class time
12/05	10 th reading of Epistles Pagitt chapter 10 postings end at class time
12/11	Synthetic Essay due to be posted into Blackboard by 11:00 PM