

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary  
**NT 631, THE PRISON LETTERS**

Instructor: John E. Toews  
Term: Fall, 2005  
Phone: 433-0112

Units: 3  
Time: Wednesday, 1:30 - 4:30 p.m.  
Email: [jetoews@netzero.com](mailto:jetoews@netzero.com)

**Course Description**

A seminar on Philippians, Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians to determine their meaning for Christian churches in the first and twenty-first centuries. The course will be a reading/lecture/discussion class.

**Course Objectives**

1. Develop first-hand knowledge of and familiarity with the text of the Prison Letters in their first century socio-political-religious context.
2. Develop an understanding of the nature of epistolary literature.
3. Work toward a biblical exegetical methodology
4. Reflect on the meaning of the Prison Letters for contemporary churches in different cultural settings.

**MBBS Program Objectives**

This course contributes to the larger goals of the Seminary program by helping the student:

1. Discern the subject-matter to which the biblical texts gives witness then and now (biblical formation).
2. Develop skills in sound biblical exegesis and interpretation (ministry formation).
3. Engage the hermeneutical task by exploring how to interpret the biblical text for the contemporary Christian community (ecclesial formation).
4. Nurture healthy interpersonal relationships and effective communication patterns in the classroom (character formation).

**Course Texts**

The text of Philippians, Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians in a modern translation, e.g., NRSV, NIT, or in Greek.

Carolyn Osiek, Philippians and Philemon, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000.

N.T. Wright, Colossians and Philemon, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, Colossians Remixed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004.

Tom Yoder Neufeld, Ephesians, Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2002.

### **Course Schedule**

August 31 Introduction to the Course  
Introduction to the Prison Letters  
Introduction to Philippians  
Exegesis of Phil. 1.1-26

**Read:** Osiek, pp. 15-47

September 7 Exegesis of Philippians 1.27-2.11

**Read:** Osiek, pp. 47-69

September 14 Exegesis of Philippians 2.12-3.21

**Read:** Osiek, pp. 69-109

September 21 Exegesis of Philippians 4.1-23

**Read:** Osiek, pp. 107-124

September 28 Theology of Philippians

Exegesis of Philemon

**Read:** Osiek, pp. 125-146

Wright, pp. 164-192

October 5 Introduction to Colossians

Exegesis of Colossians 1.1-23

**Read:** Wright, pp. 19-86

Walsh/Keesmaat, pp.

October 12 **No Class - Module Week**

October 19 Exegesis of Colossians 1.24-2.23

**Read:** Wright, pp. 86-128

Walsh/Keesmaat, pp.

October 26 Exegesis of Colossians 3.1-4.6

**Read:** Wright, pp. 128-154

Walsh/Keesmaat, pp.

November 2 Exegesis of Colossians 4.7-18  
Discussion of Walsh/Keesmaat

**Read:** Wright, pp. 154-163

November 9 Introduction to Ephesians  
Ephesians 1.1-23

**Read:** Neufeld, pp. 15-88

November 16 Ephesians 2.1-22

**Read:** Neufeld, pp. 89-137

November 23 Ephesians 3.1-21

**Read:** Neufeld, pp. 138-168

November 30 Ephesians 4.1-5.2

**Read:** Neufeld, pp. 169-225

December 7 Ephesians 5.3-6.9

**Read:** Neufeld, pp. 226-289

December 14 Ephesians 6.10-24  
Theology of Ephesians

**Read** Neufeld, pp. 290-321

### **Course Requirements**

1. Attendance and participation in class.

2. The reading of the assigned biblical text and readings for each class.

3. Write a response to Walsh/Keesmaat, Colossians Remixed. Do you agree with their understanding of our postmodern world? How do you react to their “political” reading of Colossians? What issues does the book raise for you? What themes or issues push you the most? How do you think the reading of their book will change your approach to biblical interpretation? To teaching/preaching the writings of the New Testament? **Due: November 2.**

4. Lead a seminar session on the designated text unit for Ephesians. Using Yoder-Neufeld as a starting point, help the class understand where you agree/disagree with Yoder-Neufeld, where you would take a different approach/interpretation, how you think the text unit is relevant for the contemporary church. Use a minimum of three other commentaries and three journal articles to inform your response to Neufeld’s understanding of the text. **Due: On class date of that text unit (see above).**

5. Write an 10-15 page exegetical or biblical theological paper on a text/theme from the Prison Letters. **Due: December 7**

## Course Grading

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Class attendance and participation | 10% |
| Walsh/Keesmaat review              | 20% |
| Seminar Session                    | 35% |
| Exegetical/biblical theology paper | 35% |

## Course Notes

### Academic Policies.

MBBS academic policies are described at [www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies](http://www.mbseminary.edu/fresno/policies). These policies provide guidance on academic integrity and plagiarism, incomplete course work, extensions, dates for changing registration, non-discriminatory and inclusive language, appeals, etc. Students are expected to be familiar with these policies and will be held responsible for adhering to them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to you or to a situation that you face in your studies, please speak to the professor or consult the Registrar or Academic Dean

Inclusive Language. Inclusive and/or non-discriminatory language is expected in the class and in all assignments.

Evaluation. The Research Paper will be assessed according to the following categories: appropriateness, clarity, comprehensiveness, creativity, argumentation, form, and care (see *Appendix A*).

All assignments must be completed to be eligible to earn a passing grade for the course.

“Student work will be evaluated by two standards: a) by what is considered the appropriate level of graduate performance, and b) by comparison with work submitted in a given class” (Academic Policies).

The letter grades follow the MBBS Grading Template: A (100-94%), A- (93-90%), B+ (89-87%), B (86-83%), B- (82-80%), C+ (79-77%), C (76-73%), C- (72-70%), and F (69-0%).

The performance expectations are as follows: “A ‘B’ grade is the baseline. A ‘B’ grade means the student is doing satisfactory work. The ‘B+’ or higher grade indicates that the student has exceeded the baseline performance standard. The ‘C’ grade indicates that the student has not achieved the baseline level” (Academic Policies).

Due dates. All assignments are to be submitted on or before the due dates posted in the syllabus. Late assignments will be graded down 2% for each day (or part thereof) after the due date. The late penalty may not apply to students who have a documented emergency which prevents them from submitting the assignment on the due date. Check with the instructor to see if alternative arrangements can be made.

Formatting specifications. Any of the three standard citation styles is acceptable (Chicago, APA, or MLA). Choose one and follow it consistently. Consult *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1999) which is in the Reference Section (Ref PN 147.S26) or Slade’s, *Form and Style: Research Papers, Reports, Theses*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

APPENDIX A: EVALUATION TEMPLATE

EVALUATION of *Exegetical Paper* for \_\_\_\_\_ (student)

\_\_\_\_\_ APPROPRIATENESS (re: compliance with assignment criteria)

suitable/fitting/apropos

irrelevant/unrelated/improper

\_\_\_\_\_ ARGUMENTATION (re: development of topic/arrangement of critique)

reasonable/coherent/sequential

rambles/disjointed/illogical

\_\_\_\_\_ CLARITY (re: style of writing)

flowing/lucid/succinct

broken/obscure/repetitive

\_\_\_\_\_ COMPREHENSIVENESS (re: coverage of topic or depth of analysis)

thorough/extensive/deep

superficial/sketchy/shallow

\_\_\_\_\_ CREATIVITY (re: reader reception)

novel/fresh/innovative

ordinary/average/routine

\_\_\_\_\_ FORM (re: spelling, grammar, diction, and citation conventions)

correct/accurate/appropriate

incorrect/sloppy/inappropriate

\_\_\_\_\_ CARE (re: quality of presentation)

tidy/legible/impressive

untidy/illegible/distracting