

[Second Temple
Synagogue
Literary
Archive](#) **NEW!**

[Second Temple
Synagogue
FAQs](#)

[Discussion
Board](#)

[Image Gallery](#)

[Gamla](#)
[Capernaum](#)
[Masada](#)
[Herodium](#)
[Qumran](#)
[Jerusalem](#)
[Delos](#)
[Ostia](#)
[Egypt](#)
[The Bosphorus](#)
[Credits](#)

[Book Excerpt](#)

[Abstract](#)
[Acknowledgements](#)
[Introduction](#)
[Select Bibliography](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Curriculum Vitae](#)
[NT 8326](#)
[Reli 3326](#) **NEW!**
[AST 6V90](#) **NEW!**
[Biblical
Archaeology](#)
[Archaeology
and Ancient
Civilizations](#)
[The Revelation
to John Across
the Ages](#)

[NT Studies](#) **NEW!**
[Resources](#)

[The Bible](#)
[Extra-Canonical](#)
[Judaica](#)
[Church Fathers](#)
[Historical](#)
[Papyrology](#)
[Language](#)
[Archaeology](#)
[Other Sites](#)

[Sign the Guestbook](#)

[Browse the
Guestbook](#)

Southern Methodist University

Paul in His Social Context

Spring Semester 1996
Selecman 312

Instructor: Donald D. Binder

Instructor's Phone: 367-8183

Instructor's E-mail: dbinder@mail.smu.edu
(Call or leave a message for an Office Appointment)

[Home](#) | [Book Excerpts](#) | [Ancient Synagogues](#) | [About the Author](#)

Course Description

An examination of the Pauline letters, with special attention to their social context within the Mediterranean world of the first century. Class work will involve a study of current socio-historical and sociological methodologies and an exploration of how these have been used to illuminate Paul's handling of various matters within the early churches, including social status, ethnic and gender relations, slavery, and religious ritual.

Course Requirements

I. Class Participation (10% of Final Grade)

Because there is only one class meeting per week, regular attendance at class sessions is essential. Students are expected to "read, mark and inwardly digest" the required readings assigned for the dates specified below, even if they are not responsible for a seminar paper at a particular session. Although lectures will be included within the class sessions, the emphasis of our meetings will typically be on the group's analysis and discussion of the materials associated with the day's topic. As per the *1995-96 Perkins School of Theology Bulletin*, p. 31, no credit can be given if a student misses more than three sessions, even if the absences are excused.

II. Seminar Papers (40% of Final Grade)

Each student will be required to present to the class *four* seminar papers over the course of the semester. Except for the first meeting, two papers will be presented per class session. The format of the paper should be as follows: (1) It should be single-spaced; (2) It should be presented in *outline form* (i.e., I., A., 1., a., etc.); and (3) It should be no longer than *two* pages.

Each paper will be keyed to a particular reading (or readings) assigned for that class session. Starter questions have been included below for each reading. The outlines should be detailed enough so as not to be vacuous, but not overly fixated on every concern raised by or in the text. Page citations should be given in parentheses for *short quotes* you might use and for major sections of your outline. Copies of the papers should be made for each member of the class.

The outline should: (1) Respond to the questions raised below; (2) Include treatment of any other issues perceived important to the student; and (3) Conclude with three or four issues of critical concern that might be discussed by the class.

III. Final Paper (50% of Final Grade)

Each student is required to write a research paper of about 20 *double-spaced* pages on a topic related to the subject of the course. For example, the paper might be a deeper consideration of an issue considered within one of the class sessions. Alternatively, the paper might consider a pertinent topic which we were not able to address within class.

Papers should be documented with footnotes and in-text references which cite the appropriate primary and secondary source materials. A bibliography of works consulted should be appended to the end of the paper. A short written proposal for this paper with a preliminary bibliography is to be submitted to the instructor for his approval on or before **Wednesday, February 28**. The papers are due in the instructor's mailbox in Kirby Hall no later than 5:00 p.m. on **Thursday, May 9**.

Texts

I. Texts to Purchase

The Bible. This is *the* primary text of the course, from which we gain nearly all of our specific information about Paul and the churches with which he was associated. Here, special attention will be paid to the seven undisputed Pauline Epistles (I Thes, Gal, I Cor, II Cor, Rom, Philem, Phil) and the Acts of the Apostles. Students who are able should examine the Greek texts of the relevant passages. Others should consult at least two of the more recent English translations such as *The New Revised Standard Version*, *The Revised English Bible* or *The New Jerusalem Bible*.

Elliott, John Hall. *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). We will be reading this book early in the course. It provides a concise overview of the methodologies involved in the recent surge of studies dealing with the social dimensions of the New Testament.

Meeks, Wayne A. *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). This modern classic of Pauline Studies will aid us in approaching the Biblical text. Meeks raises some interesting questions and answers many of them ably.

Theissen, Gerd. *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982). This collection of essays presents a careful consideration of several important social aspects of the Pauline Church at Corinth. The final chapter addresses methodological concerns.

II. Texts to Borrow

Additional works we shall be reading, either whole or in-part, are listed below in the Outline of Class Meetings. With the exception of those items in the Bridwell Journal Collection [JC] or in the Reference Room [RR], all of the works cited below have been placed on reserve in the Library.

Outline of Class Meetings

January 31 *Introduction*

- Overview of the Course
- Good Housekeeping
- Textual Criticism and Dates to Remember
- The Historical and the Social: the Yin and the Yang of this Course

- Homiletical Possibilities?

February 7 *Social Historical -vs- Social Scientific Criticism*

- A Question of Methodologies
- How NT Scholars Line up

Questions for Papers:

Elliott. What distinguishes the Social-Historical from the Sociological approach? How do the two methods draw from each other? What are some of the pitfalls inherent in each approach?

Theissen. What three ways does Theissen suggest for drawing information from ancient texts? What are the possible benefits and shortcomings of each of these three ways?

February 14 *Ancient Urban Life*

- *Life in the Ancient Greco-Roman City*
- *Pauline Christianity as an Urban Phenomenon*

Reading:

Meeks, pp. 9-50

Massey, Michael *Society in Imperial Rome: Selections from Juvenal, Petronius, Martial, Tacitus, Seneca, and Pliny* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 1-23

Dan P. Cole, "Corinth and Ephesus," *Bible Review*, 4 (1988):20-30 [JC]

Acts 18-19, II Cor 11:23-33

Questions for Papers:

Meeks and Massey. What were some of the pros and cons of living in an ancient Greco-Roman city? How might these have sorted out depending upon your social status? How might some of these have affected the growth of Pauline Christianity?

Cole, Acts and II Cor. Why might Paul have decided to spend so much time in Ephesus and Corinth? Noting especially the viewpoints of Acts and 2 Cor, what may have been some of the benefits and pitfalls of Paul's decision?

February 21 *The Pauline Churches and Social Status*

- A Matter of Status
- Class Warfare?

Reading:

Meeks, pp. 51-73

Horsley, G. H. R., Swinn, S. P. and Centre Macquarie University. *Ancient History Documentary Research, New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: Linguistic Essays* (North Ryde, N.S.W.: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, 1989), pp. 95-114

Theissen, pp. 121-143

I Cor 8-11:1

Questions for Papers:

Meeks and Horsley. How does Meeks come to decide upon *status* as a useful category for measuring social stratification in the Pauline churches? What are the benefits and shortcomings of this category? How does Meeks arrive at his tentative conclusion regarding the composition of the Corinthian Church? How might the Ephesian inscription quoted by Horsley help us understand the composition of the Pauline Church at Ephesus?

Theissen and I Cor. In what ways does Theissen see social status as contributing to the dispute alluded to by Paul in I Cor. 8-11:1? What appears to be Paul's command to each of the groups involved in the dispute?

February 28 *Ethnic Tensions* (Final Paper Proposals Due)

- A Question of Purity
- Neither Jew nor Greek?

Reading:

Cohen, Shaye J. D. *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1989), pp. 27-59

Malina, Bruce J. *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, Rev. ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 149-183

Miner, P. S. *The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans* (London: SCM, 1971), pp. 1-35

Romans 14-16

Questions for Papers:

Cohen and Malina. What were some of the cultural pressures upon Jews of this period to Hellenize? What were the range of responses that Jews made to these pressures? How did the notion of purity figure in the responses of some?

Miner and Romans. According to Miner, how might purity laws have been in play in the apparent tensions between "the weak" and "the strong" in Rom 14-16? What is Paul's proposed solution to the conflict?

March 6 *Paul and Slavery*

- Slaves of All Sort
- Neither Slave nor Free?
- As a Beloved Brother

Reading:

Bradley, K. R. *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 10-30, 57-106

Massey, Michael. *Society in Imperial Rome: Selections from Juvenal, Petronius, Martial, Tacitus, Seneca, and Pliny* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 96-102

Llewelyn, S. R., Kearsley, R. A. and Centre Macquarie University. *Ancient History Documentary Research, New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1980-81* (North Ryde, N.S.W.: The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, 1992), pp. 55-60

Questions for Papers:

Bradley and Massey. What was the nature and the extent of slavery in the first century? What legal status and rights did a slave have during this period? What were the various types and "classes" of slaves?

Llewelyn and Philemon. What do the papyri quoted in Llewelyn tell us about the problem of runaway slaves? In Philemon, how does Paul reconcile the requirements of Roman Law with the Christian formula that there is "neither slave nor free" in Christ?

March 13 (Spring Break, no class)

March 20 *The Role of Women*

- Societal Norms for First Century Women
- An Early Liberation Movement?
- Neither Male nor Female?
- Paul as Feminist or Misogynist?

Reading:

Cantarella, Eva. *Pandora's Daughters: the Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 90-98, 135-170

Boatwright, Mary Taliaferro. "Plancia Magna of Perge" in Sarah B. Pomeroy, ed., *Women's History and Ancient History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 249-272

Wire, Antoinette Clark. "Prophecy and Women Prophets in Corinth" in *Gospel Origins & Christian Beginnings: In Honor of James M. Robinson* edited by James E. Goehring, James McConkey Robinson and Helmut Q. Koester (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1990), pp. 134-150

I Cor 14

Questions for Papers:

Cantarella and Boatwright. While taking care to note the lack of representative evidence in this area, what kind of status did women have and what roles did they typically play in first-century Greco-Roman society? In what ways did Plancia Magna either exemplify or prove to be the exception to these norms?

Wire and I Cor. 14. Wire takes a minority view of the status of I Cor 14:34-35; what are her arguments for the inclusion of this passage in the original Pauline letter? Granting Wire's thesis that the passage originates with Paul, what is her explanation for Paul's placement of this passage in I Cor? Do you find her position convincing?

March 27 *Sex, Marriage and Celibacy*

- One Big Happy Family?
- To Be or not to Be (Celibate)
- A Monkey Wrench in the System of *Patria Potestas*?

Reading:

Dixon, Suzanne *The Roman Family* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992),

pp. 61-97, 166-181

Massey, Michael *Society in Imperial Rome: Selections from Juvenal, Petronius, Martial, Tacitus, Seneca, and Pliny* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 65-95

MacDonald, Margaret Y. "Women Holy in Body and Spirit: The Social Setting of 1 Corinthians 7," *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990):161-181 [JC]

I Cor 7

Questions for Papers:

Dixon and Massey. What functions did the family play in the Roman Empire? What was the character of the relationship between husband and wife? What was the nature and the extent of adultery, divorce and celibacy in this period?

MacDonald and I Cor. According to MacDonald, what were the primary problems addressed by Paul in I Cor 7? What is the Apostle's response, and in what way (if at all) can we say that this response constitutes a "theology of marriage"?

April 3 *The Ekklesia*

- Proposed Models for the *Ekklesia*
- Insiders and Outsiders
- Paul as Professor?

Reading:

Meeks, pp. 74-139

Alexander, Loveday. "Paul and the Hellenistic Schools: The Evidence of Galen" in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 60-83

Acts 16, 19:8-10, I Thess 4-5

Questions for Papers:

Meeks. What potential analogues to the *Ekklesia* does Meeks present to the reader? What are the points of contact and divergence in these comparisons? What are some of the boundaries Meeks perceives between the Pauline Churches and "the world"? How did the Pauline Churches appear to be governed?

Alexander, Acts and I Thess. According to Alexander, how did Galen perceive the relationship between the "school" and the "church"? What is his reasoning? Based on the evidence from Acts and I Thess, to what degree do you believe we can call the Pauline Churches "schools"?

April 10 *Christian, Jewish and Pagan Ritual*

- Ancient Cults: Religion of What Sort?
- Structural Problems
- Initiations

Reading:

Burkert, Walter. *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 1-65

Apuleius, and John Gwyn Griffiths, *The Isis-Book: (Metamorphoses, Book XI)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), pp. 70-109

Meeks, pp. 140-163

Romans 6, 8:12-17, Phil 2:6-11, II Cor 1:19-22

Questions for Papers:

Burkert and Apuleius. What does Burkert see as the primary function of the mystery cults? How might his hypothesis be supported by the tale of the "rebirth" of the character Lucius in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*? How does Burkert categorize the cults according to organization? How does Burkert believe the cults differ from the Christian *Ekklesia*?

Meeks, Romans, Philippians and II Corinthians. According to Meeks, in what ways can we call Pauline Christianity a "religion"? Given the evidence from the Pauline Letters and Meek's use of sociological analysis, what was the shape and significance of the Christian initiation rite of Baptism? What were the points of contact and divergences between Christian Baptism and Jewish and Pagan initiation rites?

April 17 *Dining and the Lord's Supper*

- Taxonomy of a Banquet
- Grace at Meals?
- Segregated Dining

Reading:

Smith, Dennis Edwin and Taussig, Hal. *Many Tables: The Eucharist in the New Testament and Liturgy Today* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), pp. 21-35

Philo, *The Contemplative Life 40-90* (Loeb Classical Library no. 363 [Philo IX], pp. 136-169) [RR]

Theissen, pp. 145-174

I Cor. 11:17-34

Questions for Papers:

Smith and Philo. What is the general shape of a Greco-Roman banquet? What were some of the social functions of these gatherings? How does Philo contrast the typical Pagan banquet with the meal of the *Therapeutae*?

Theissen and I Cor. What is Theissen's reconstruction of the conflict concerning the Corinthians' practice of the Lord's Supper alluded to in I Cor 11:17-34? How does Paul attempt to remedy this conflict?

April 24 *Paul and Greco-Roman Rhetoric*

- Just Rhetoric?
- A Matter of Style
- Paul's Rhetorical Finesse

Reading:

Clark, Donald Lemen. *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), pp. 24-66

[Cicero], *Ad Herenium* 4.1-18 (Loeb Classical Library, no. 403, pp. 229-275) [RR]

Lampe, Peter. "Theological Wisdom and the 'Word About the Cross,'" *Interpretation* 44 (1990) 117-31 [JC]

I Cor 1-4

Questions for Papers:

Clark and [Cicero]. What was the general shape of education in Greco-Roman society? What was the purpose of rhetoric, and what are the three general forms of the ancient speech? According to [Cicero], in what ways might the goals of rhetoric be successfully realized?

Lampe and I Cor. What is Lampe's rhetorical analysis of I Cor 1-4? According to this analysis, how does Paul use rhetoric to make his theological points more persuasive?

May 1 *Paul and Midrash*

- Ancient Exegesis
- Galatians: Quarreling Rabbis?

Reading:

Neusner, Jacob *What Is Midrash?; and, A Midrash Reader* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 1-16, 80-110

Martyn, J. Louis. "A Law-Observant Mission to the Gentiles: The Background of Galatians," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 38:307-324 [JC]

Gal 3:6-4:7, 4:22-5:6

Questions for Papers:

Neusner. What is Neusner's definition of Midrash? What three general forms did Midrash take? What exegetical techniques were frequently used in doing Midrash?

Martyn and Galatians. What is Martyn's reconstruction of the situation facing Paul in the Galatian Churches? According to this view, how does Paul use Midrash in order to deal with this situation?

MINORITY CONCERNS AND THE PERKINS CURRICULUM

In 1975 the Perkins Senate passed resolutions which bear on the relation of the Perkins curriculum to this school's common concern for the status of ethnic minority groups and of women both in education for ministry and in the ministry itself. The following statement summarizes these resolutions with respect to all courses except those in the area of Ministry.

1. Instructors and students alike are urged to use inclusive language, images and metaphors which will give full and positive value to both the past contributions and the future prospects of ethnic minorities and women in the church and in society at large.

2. Instructors and students alike are urged to give sensitive consideration to the role of images from a predominantly white and male culture in shaping both the language and concepts of Christian theology and the models and methods of Christian ministry that are widely current today.

3. Instructors are urged to make every effort to provide, in the assignments and formats of their courses, opportunities (1) for women students and students from ethnic minority groups to pursue their study with special reference to their own status or tradition and (2) for all students to become acquainted with the special problems and conditions that affect women and ethnic minority groups

in church and society.

© Donald D. Binder, 1997-99
All Rights Reserved