

Reformed Theological Seminary
NT5300 · Pauline Epistles
Course Syllabus · Spring 2026 · RTS-Orlando

1. Course Details

- 3 credit hours
- Wednesday 8:00 am – 11:00 am
- Description: “An exposition of the epistles in chronological order that emphasizes the application of Paul’s theology to the pastoral needs of the churches of his day and ours.” (*RTS Catalog 2025–2027*, p. 77).

2. Instructor Information

- Zachary J. Cole, Ph.D., Associate Professor of New Testament, RTS-O
- E-mail: zcole@rts.edu
- Office: Orlando Campus #3-214
- Office phone: 407-278-8167
- Office hours: e-mail to arrange an appointment

3. Course Objectives

- To understand the content, message, and redemptive-historical significance of twelve of the Pauline epistles (all but Romans).
- To comprehend the basic structure of Pauline theology.
- To interpret Paul’s letters responsibly and contextually, conscious of their exegetical, theological, and practical implications.

4. Bibliography

REQUIRED

Holy Bible (translation of your choice). **Read Paul’s epistles minus Romans.**

Ridderbos, Herman. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*. Trans. J. R. de Witt. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975. **Read 400 pages of your choice, but must include pgs. 44–90.**

AND ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:*

Barclay, John M. G. *Paul and the Power of Grace*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020. **Read all.**

Hays, Richard B. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1989. **Read all.**

Macaskill, Grant. *Living in Union with Christ: Paul’s Gospel and Christian Moral Identity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019. **Read all.**

*If you have already read one of these for a different class, you must choose a different one.

5. Course Requirements

- **Reading affirmation (10%):** Students will indicate how much of the reading they have completed.
- **Critical reflection and response (20%):** Students will write 1,000 words (roughly two pages) of critical reflection on one idea or concept of their choice from EITHER Macaskill's, *Living in Union with Christ* OR Barclay's, *Paul and the Power of Grace* OR Hays's, *Echoes of Scripture*. This reflection can be positive, negative, or mixed, but must engage critically with the book. Students must then ALSO write an additional 500 words responding to another student's reflection. In the response of 500 words, the student must engage charitably with the reflection and offer a thoughtful response to it. Use of additional sources is not required. Grading criteria:
 - **Style:** the student adheres to the word count and writes in clear and correct English prose.
 - **Accuracy:** the student gives evidence of having read and understood the reading.
 - **Reflection:** the student provides critical, thoughtful, and in-depth personal reflection on the material.
 - **Charity:** the student writes the reflection and response with Christian charity.
- **Exam (35%):** Students will complete a final exam lasting two hours. The exam will cover the lecture and biblical material (not textbook readings).
- **Thematic research paper (35%):** Students will write a 3,000-word paper (+ or - 10%) on the contribution of *one* epistle (1 Cor–Phlm) to *one* key topic in Pauline theology.¹ Students must engage with scholarly resources including commentaries, monographs, and journal articles. See grading criteria below. Grading criteria:
 - **Style:** the student adheres to the word count, writes in clear and correct English prose, and uses proper citation style.
 - **Awareness:** the student identifies a relevant theological topic and demonstrates an awareness of why it matters.
 - **Argument:** the student argues a clearly stated thesis with supporting evidence.
 - **Synthesis:** the student synthesizes relevant information about their topic from their chosen epistle.
 - **Research:** the student demonstrates an awareness of scholarly contributions to the topic and represents them fairly and accurately.
 - **Charity:** the student writes with academic honesty, intellectual rigor, and Christian charity.

¹ For example, a student could choose to study what 1 Corinthians teaches about Old Testament typology, or what 1 Timothy teaches about gender, or what Ephesians teaches about unity, or what Philemon teaches about reconciliation, or what 1 Thessalonians teaches about eschatology, etc.

6. Grading System

A	(97-100)	4.00
A-	(94-96)	3.66
B+	(91-93)	3.33
B	(88-90)	3.00
B-	(86-87)	2.66
C+	(83-85)	2.33
C	(80-82)	2.00
C-	(78-79)	1.66
D+	(75-77)	1.33
D	(72-74)	1.00
D-	(70-71)	0.66
F	(below 70)	0.00
I	(incomplete)	-
W	(withdraw)	-
S	(satisfactory)	-
P	(passing)	-

7. Other Information

- Technology: in class, students are permitted use laptops and/or tablets, provided they do not prove disruptive, distracting, or detrimental to learning. The instructor reserves the right to ban them.

8. Class Schedule

January 28	Classes begin
February 11	Last day to add a class
March 4	Last day to drop a class
March 16-20	Spring Break
May 5	Last day of spring semester classes
May 8	Term paper deadline (11:00 a.m.)
May 11-14	Examination period

Course Objectives Related to MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: Pauline Epistles (NT5300)

Professor: Zachary Cole

Campus: Orlando

Date: Spring 2026

MDiv* Student Learning Outcomes		Rubric	Mini-Justification
<p><i>In order to measure the success of the MDiv curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MDiv outcomes.</i></p>			
<p><i>*As the MDiv is the core degree at RTS, the MDiv rubric will be used in this syllabus.</i></p>			
Articulation (oral & written)	Broadly understands and articulates knowledge, both oral and written, of essential biblical, theological, historical, and cultural/global information, including details, concepts, and frameworks. Also includes ability to preach and teach the meaning of Scripture to both heart and mind with clarity and enthusiasm.	Strong	The assignments require students to articulate complex ideas clearly, charitably, and with nuance.
Scripture	Significant knowledge of the original meaning of Scripture. Also, the concepts for and skill to research further into the original meaning of Scripture and to apply Scripture to a variety of modern circumstances. (Includes appropriate use of original languages and hermeneutics; and integrates theological, historical, and cultural/global perspectives.)	Strong	The course content is focused entirely on the Pauline corpus.
Reformed Theology	Significant knowledge of Reformed theology and practice, with emphasis on the Westminster Standards.	Moderate	Reformed distinctives are considered within each of Paul's letters.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the Triune God that aids the student's sanctification.	None	
Worldview	Burning desire to conform all of life to the Word of God. Includes ability to interact within a denominational context, within the broader worldwide church, and with significant public issues.	Minimal	Students will be pushed to apply their reading to relevant issues in the contemporary world.
Winsomely Reformed	Embraces a winsomely Reformed ethos. (Includes an appropriate ecumenical spirit with other Christians, especially Evangelicals; a concern to present the Gospel in a God-honoring manner to non-Christians; and a truth-in-love attitude in disagreements.)	Minimal	Course content and reading situate Reformed views on Pauline theology alongside other views.
Pastoral Ministry	Ability to minister the Word of God to hearts and lives of both churched and unchurched, to include preaching, teaching, leading in worship, leading and shepherding the local congregation, aiding in spiritual maturity, concern for non-Christians.	Moderate	Students will be pushed to consider how Paul's letters can be and should be applied in pastoral ministry.