



Reuben Welch School of Theology & Christian Ministry

BIB 4002: The Letters of Paul: Faith, Hope, and Love Across Distance and Difference (3 Units)

Spring, 2026

PROFESSOR: DR. MATHEW E. SOUSA	EMAIL: MSOUSA@POINTLOMA.EDU
Meeting Time: Thursdays, 4:30-7:30 P.M.	Meeting Location: To be determined
Final: To be submitted via Canvas	Office Hours: By appointment

I. PLNU Mission: *To Teach – To Shape – To Send*

Point Loma Nazarene University exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service is an expression of faith. Being of Wesleyan heritage, we strive to be a learning community where grace is foundational, truth is pursued, and holiness is a way of life.

II. Course Description

How do followers of Christ live in step with the Holy Spirit? A study of Paul's letters to far-flung churches around the ancient Mediterranean, most of which he founded and nurtured as a missionary pastor.

III. Course Learning Outcomes

Having successfully completed this course, students will be able:

1. To demonstrate substantial familiarity with and knowledge of the thirteen Pauline letters.
2. To articulate an account of Paul's life and theological convictions based on the Pauline corpus.
3. To identify a range of questions (literary, historical, and theological) relevant to the interpretation of Paul's letters.
4. To read the letters of Paul in ways that foster faithful Christian practice.

IV. Required Texts

1. Matthew L. Skinner, *A Companion to the New Testament: Paul and the Pauline Letters* (Baylor, 2018). ISBN: 9781481307833
2. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *When in Romans: An Invitation to Linger with the Gospel according to Paul* (Baker, 2016). ISBN 9780801097386
3. Lisa Bowens, *African American Readings of Paul: Reception, Resistance, and Transformation* (Eerdmans, 2020). ISBN 9780802876768

V. Attendance and Participation

Regular and punctual attendance at all class sessions is considered essential to optimum academic achievement. If the student is absent for more than 10 percent of class sessions (i.e., more than one class session), the student will receive a written warning of de-enrollment. If the absences exceed 20 percent, the student may be de-enrolled without notice until the university withdrawal date or, after that date, receive an “F” grade.

NOTE: Giving false information on the daily roll sheet (i.e., signing someone else in or having someone else sign you in) is an act of cheating that is equal to cheating on an exam. It will subject you to the academic dishonesty penalties of the university, including failure of this course and possible expulsion from the university.

VI. Assessment and Grading

Assignment Type	Percentage of Course Grade
Reading Logs	10% (total)
Participation	25% (total)
Interpretive Leadership	15%
Article Presentation	20%
Interpretive Essay	30%
Total:	100%

Reading Logs (10%): Students are to report their completion of the assigned reading for each week in the Reading Log located on Canvas (see the course schedule below for due dates). Completing assigned readings in a timely manner will serve to prepare students for class discussions and assignments. This assignment group relates to learning outcomes #1-4.

Participation (25%): Participation includes the completion of various assignments over the course of the semester: interpretive notes, a thesis statement, an essay draft, and a peer review. Most class sessions will require students to complete interpretive notes on an assigned passage. These notes are to consist of responses to assigned questions and are to be approximately 500 words in length (see the document, “Interpretive Practices for Reading the New Testament,” and the questions listed for each assigned passage in the course schedule below). On March 26th a one-sentence thesis statement is due in preparation for the interpretive essay assignment, and on April 23rd a penultimate draft of the interpretive essay is to be submitted for peer review. A review of a peer’s interpretive essay draft is due on April 30th.

All participation assignments will be graded as either “pass” (100%) or “fail” (50% or below). An assignment will receive a passing grade (i.e., 100%) IF the following requirements are met: the

assignment **(1)** is completed by the deadline specified; **(2)** supplies the minimum content required (typically a word count); and **(3)** demonstrates substantive analysis of and thoughtful engagement with the subject matter. This assignment group relates to learning outcomes #1-4.

Interpretive Leadership (15%): In pairs (subject to enrollment), students will lead one class discussion on the interpretation of an assigned passage. Discussion leaders will complete the interpretive notes assignment on their passage as well as additional work with pertinent primary and secondary sources. Discussion leaders are to prepare sufficient material to guide and sustain a stimulating discussion of approximately thirty minutes in length (see the document, “BIB 4002: Interpretive Leadership,” for directions). This assignment group relates to learning outcomes #1-4.

Article Presentation (20%): Each student will present a summary and assessment of one or more assigned articles from the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* and facilitate a stimulating class discussion concerning the significance of the material reviewed. The presentation and facilitation of discussion is to be approximately twenty-five minutes in length (see the document, “BIB 4002: Article Presentation,” for directions). This assignment relates to learning outcomes #1-4.

Interpretive Essay (30%): The final assignment for this course is a research essay, 1,500-2,000 words in length, that presents an orderly argument for and a clear exposition of a theological claim of a passage in Paul’s letters (see the document, “BIB 4002: Interpretive Essay,” for directions). A thesis statement is due March 26th (for in-class discussion) and a penultimate draft (for peer review) is due April 23rd. The essay is due May 6th by 11:59 pm (Canvas). This assignment relates to learning outcomes #1-4.

Course Grading Scale:

93-100	A	77-79	C+	60-62	D-
90-92	A-	73-76	C	0-59	F
87-89	B+	70-72	C-		
83-86	B	67-69	D+		
80-82	B-	63-66	D		

VII. Course Policies

Late Work Policy

An assignment is “late” if it is submitted after the deadline specified. The grade for a Reading Log or an Interpretive Essay will drop by one half of a letter grade each day the assignment is late. For example, if a Log merits a 90% (A-) but is a day late, it will earn a grade of 85% (B); if it is two days late, it will earn a grade of 80% (B-); and so on. Participation assignments that are submitted late will receive a “fail” grade of 50% or below. Extensions and accommodations are available for extenuating circumstances only.

PLNU Academic Honesty Policy

Students should demonstrate academic honesty by doing original work and by giving appropriate credit to the ideas of others. Academic dishonesty is the act of presenting information, ideas, and/or concepts as one's own when in reality they are the results of another person's creativity and effort. A faculty member who believes a situation involving academic dishonesty has been detected may assign a failing grade for that assignment or examination, or, depending on the seriousness of the offense, for the course. For all student appeals, faculty and students should follow the procedures outlined in the University Catalog. See [Academic Policies](#) for definitions of kinds of academic dishonesty and for further policy information.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., ChatGPT, iA Writer, Marmot, Botowski, GrammarlyGo, Perplexity, etc.) is prohibited in this course for any aspect of your work, including idea generation, drafting, editing, or final submissions. This course is designed to assess your independent critical thinking, writing, and research skills without the assistance of AI technologies. Violations of this policy will be treated as breaches of academic integrity.

PLNU Academic Accommodations Policy

PLNU is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all its programs, services, and activities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students with disabilities may request course-related accommodations by contacting the Educational Access Center (EAC), located in the Bond Academic Center (EAC@pointloma.edu or 619-849-2533). Once a student's eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, the EAC will work with the student to create an Accommodation Plan (AP) that outlines allowed accommodations. Professors are able to view a student's approved accommodations through Accommodate.

PLNU highly recommends that students speak with their professors during the first two weeks of each semester/term about the implementation of their AP in that particular course. Accommodations are not retroactive so clarifying with the professor at the outset is one of the best ways to promote positive academic outcomes.

Students who need accommodations for a disability should contact the EAC as early as possible (i.e., ideally before the beginning of the semester) to assure appropriate accommodations can be provided. It is the student's responsibility to make the first contact with the EAC. Students cannot assume that because they had accommodations in the past, their eligibility at PLNU is automatic. All determinations at PLNU must go through the EAC process. This is to protect the privacy of students with disabilities who may not want to disclose this information and are not asking for any accommodations.

Language and Belonging

Point Loma Nazarene University faculty are committed to helping create a safe and hospitable learning environment for all students. As Christian scholars we are keenly aware of the power of language and believe in treating others with dignity. As such, it is important that our language be equitable, inclusive, and prejudice free. Inclusive/Bias-free language is the standard outlined

by all major academic style guides, including MLA, APA, and Chicago, and it is the expected norm in university-level work. Good writing and speaking do not use unsubstantiated or irrelevant generalizations about personal qualities such as age, disability, economic class, ethnicity, marital status, parentage, political or religious beliefs, race, gender, sex, or sexual orientation. Inclusive language also avoids using stereotypes or terminology that demeans persons or groups based on age, disability, class, ethnicity, gender, race, language, or national origin. Respectful use of language is particularly important when referring to those outside of the religious and lifestyle commitments of those in the PLNU community. By working toward precision and clarity of language, we mark ourselves as serious and respectful scholars, and we model the Christ-like quality of hospitality. If you (or someone you know) have experienced other forms of discrimination, you can find more information on reporting and resources at www.pointloma.edu/nondiscrimination.

State Authorization

State authorization is a formal determination by a state that Point Loma Nazarene University is approved to conduct activities regulated by that state. In certain states outside California, Point Loma Nazarene University is not authorized to enroll online (distance education) students. If a student moves to another state after admission to the program and/or enrollment in an online course, continuation within the program and/or course will depend on whether Point Loma Nazarene University is authorized to offer distance education courses in that state. It is the student's responsibility to notify the institution of any change in his or her physical location. Refer to the map on [State Authorization](#) to view which states allow distance education outside California.

PLNU Copyright Policy

Point Loma Nazarene University, as a non-profit educational institution, is entitled by law to use materials protected by the US Copyright Act for classroom education. Any use of those materials outside the class may violate the law.

PLNU Recording Notification

In order to enhance the learning experience, please be advised that this course may be recorded by the professor for educational purposes, and access to these recordings will be limited to enrolled students and authorized personnel. Note that all recordings are subject to copyright protection. Any unauthorized distribution or publication of these recordings without written approval from the University (refer to the Dean) is strictly prohibited.

VIII. Course Schedule

Day	Topics	Reading Assignments	Written Assignments
1/15	Course Introduction (+ sign-ups); Why Study Paul? The Reader in NT Interpretation		
1/22	Paul and his World(s); Paul's Gospel and Theology	Due before class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinner, 1-45 • Gorman (PDF on Canvas): "The Greco-Roman Context of Paul's Mission" 	Due before class (Canvas): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Log
1/29	Romans chs. 1-8; <i>DPL II: Law</i> (example)	Due before class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinner, 47-77 • Gaventa, 1-74 • Romans chs. 1-8 	Due before class (Canvas): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Log • Interpretive Notes: Rom 8:1-17 Questions: 1.3, 2.1, 4.2, 5.3
2/5	Romans chs. 9-16; <i>DPL II: Righteousness</i> <i>DPL II: Atonement</i>	Due before class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaventa, 75-128 • Romans chs. 9-16 	Due before class (Canvas): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading log • Interpretive Notes: Rom 12:1-21 Questions: 1.3, 2.1, 3.1, 5.3
2/12	1 Corinthians; <i>DPL II: Gifts of the Spirit</i> <i>DPL II: Resurrection</i>	Due before class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinner, 79-108 • 1 Corinthians chs. 1-16 	Due before class (Canvas): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading log • Interpretive Notes: 1 Cor 15:1-34 Questions: 1.3, 3.1, 3.3, 4.2
2/19	2 Corinthians; <i>DPL II: Faith + Creation and New Creation</i> <i>DPL II: Eschatology</i>	Due before class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinner, 109-133 • 2 Corinthians chs. 1-13 	Due before class on Canvas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading log • Interpretive Notes: 2 Cor 5:11-21 Questions: 2.1, 3.1, 4.2, 5.3
2/26	Galatians; <i>DPL II: Gospel</i> <i>DPL II: Justification</i>	Due before class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinner, 135-155 • Galatians chs. 1-6 • Bowens, 1-58 	Due before class on Canvas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading log • Interpretive Notes: Gal 2:15-21 Questions: 2.2, 3.2, 4.2, 5.3

3/5	Asynchronous learning (no class): Lecture: Ephesians (Canvas); Thesis preparation	Due Thurs. (3/5) by 11:59 pm: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinner, 157-191 • Ephesians chs. 1-6 • Bowens, 59-112 	Due Thurs. (3/5) by 11:59 pm (Canvas): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading Log • Interpretive Notes: Eph 2:11-22 Questions: 1.3, 2.2, 3.2, 5.1
3/12	Spring Break		
3/19	Philippians; <i>DPL II</i> : In Christ + Cruciformity <i>DPL II</i> : Lord + Prison, Prisoner	Due before class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinner, 193-206 • Philippians chs. 1-4 • Bowens, 113-186 	Due before class on Canvas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading log • Interpretive Notes: Phil 3:1-21 Questions: 1.4, 2.2, 3.3, 4.2
3/26	Colossians; <i>DPL II</i> : Households and Household Codes + Hymns, Hymn Fragments, Confessions <i>DPL II</i> : Christology	Due before class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinner, 207-219 • Colossians chs. 1-4 • Bowens, 187-264 	Due before class on Canvas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading log • Interpretive Notes: Col 2:6-19 Questions: 2.1, 3.3, 4.2, 5.3 • Thesis statement
4/2	Easter Recess		
4/9	1-2 Thessalonians; <i>DPL II</i> : Salvation <i>DPL II</i> : Paul and Judaism	Due before class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinner, 221-251 • 1 Thessalonians chs. 1-5 • 2 Thessalonians chs. 1-3 • Bowens, 265-290 	Due before class on Canvas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading log • Interpretive Notes: 1 Thess 4:13-18 Questions: 1.3, 2.2, 3.3, 4.2
4/16	The Pastorals; <i>DPL II</i> : Woman + Woman Named in Paul <i>DPL II</i> : Church	Due before class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinner, 253-275 • 1 Timothy chs. 1-6 • 2 Timothy chs. 1-4 • Titus chs. 1-3 • Bowens, 291-310 	Due before class on Canvas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading log • Interpretive Notes: 1 Tim 3:1-16 Questions: 1.3, 2.2, 3.1, 5.3

4/23	Philemon; <i>DPL II: Slave, Slavery</i> <i>DPL II: Coworkers, Paul and His</i>	Due before class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skinner, 277-288 • Philemon vv. 1-25 	Due before class on Canvas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading log • Essay Drafts
4/30	The Apostle Paul	Due before class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gorman (PDF on Canvas): “Paul Our Contemporary” 	Due before class on Canvas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading log • Peer Review
	Finals Week		Due Wed. (5/6) by 11:59 pm (Canvas): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpretive Essay

This syllabus is subject to change if deemed necessary to enhance student learning and meet course outcomes.