

University of  
Dubuque  
Theological  
Seminary

## BI 673: Romans

English Exegesis

Fall 2023

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### Instructor Information

Dr. Nicholas A. Elder  
**E-mail:** [nelder@dbq.edu](mailto:nelder@dbq.edu)  
**Phone #:** 913-221-1901  
**Virtual Office Hours:** TBD

### Course Description

A study of Paul's letter to the Romans focusing on the content and theology of the letter and in-depth exegesis of key passages. Different scholarly perspectives on Romans will be discussed and explored. Special attention will be paid to understanding Romans in light of its first century context and to the relevance of Romans for the church today.

The artistic centerpiece for the course is Lovis Corinth's 1911 oil painting, *Der Apostel Paulus*. Corinth offers a compellingly repugnant portrait of Paul. He is wild-eyed, pale, disheveled, and looks like he might be a danger to himself and others. His right hand is raised in a classic iconographic teaching pose. But the hand is not airy and serene as in most depictions of the apostle; it is tense and impassioned, like Paul's message. Paul anachronistically holds a bound, codex-form Bible, but his gaze is not on it. Rather, he glowers at the viewer, and the more one stares back into his gaunt eyes, the more captivating he becomes.

This class explores the religious, theological, historical, and social worlds of Paul's letter to the Romans. It also attends to the reception of Paul throughout history and how this letter is presently read in various social contexts. Students will practice and develop various exegetical skillsets related to the interpretation of the New Testament in general, Pauline letters more specifically, and Romans most specifically. In the act of interpretation, they will merge their own intersectional social worlds with Paul's.

Paul is polarizing. Many find him either repugnant or compelling, like Corinth's portrayal of him, though not usually both at the same time. For some, he is theological genius *par excellence* as Christianity's founder. For others, his message is stiff and repressive. By the end of this course, as we gaze at the apostle and his letter to the Romans, my hope is that disagreeable impressions of Paul will be refined by something compelling and liberative. Likewise, I hope strictly amiable and goodly portrayals of the apostle might be besmirched by something ribald and indecorous.

## Objectives

### Course Objectives

1. Exegete a select passage from Romans, paying attention to the world behind, world of, and world in front of the text.
2. Identify and articulate central tenets of your own social context, explaining how these affect how you interpret the New Testament and Romans in particular.
3. As part of the interpretive process, make use of multiple biblical commentaries that adopt various exegetical, theological, and ideological perspectives.
4. Utilize Greek linguistic tools in service of interpretation of Romans and select passages from it.

### Curricular Objectives

- *Be formed by, live in, and minister out of Scripture and the historical and theological tradition of the church (MDiv)*
- *Interpret the Christian Scriptures through faithful exegesis and in light of the Christian tradition (MDiv)*
- *Preach the Word of God with faithfulness and clarity (MDiv)*
- *Articulate and reflect critically and constructively on the biblical and theological foundations of God's mission to the world (MAMD)*
- *Articulate and interpret key themes from the Christian scriptures in conversation with*



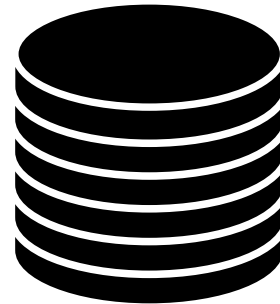
# Specifications Grading

This class uses what is called specifications or "specs" grading. Final grades are **not** determined by the collective score of weighted items. Rather, they are determined by the number of grade items that you successfully complete. Each grade item is assessed on a pass-fail basis and contains detailed specifications. If these specifications are met, then the item is passed. If they are not, the work can be revised on the basis of the professor's feedback and resubmitted until the specifications are met and the submission passes.

The rationale for using this grading system is that it removes much of the subjectivity of grading, restores rigor to academic work, and it is learning-outcome oriented.

To earn a specific letter grade, you must complete the minimum number of items in each of the categories. The minimum number you complete in any category will ultimately determine your final grade. For example, if you complete the 25 minor items required for an "A" but only complete 4 major items, which is the requirement for an "B+", then your final grade would be a "B+" not an "A."

Letter Grade	Minor Items —	Major Items +
A	25	5
A-	23	5
B+	22	4
B	21	4
B-	20	4
C+	19	3
C	18	3
C-	17	3
D+	16	2
D	15	2
D-	14	1
F	0–13	0



**Grace Tokens:** Every student receives two "grace tokens" that can be used at any time during the course. These "grace tokens" can be redeemed for any of the following with no explanation needed:

- Credit for a minor item that was not completed
- A one-week extension on a major grade item





# Grade Items

## Options-based Learning

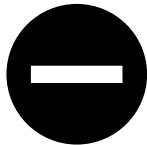
I work under the principle that as humans we do our best work when we choose what work we do. For this reason, there are a variety of options for the various kinds of assignments that you might complete in the class. The number of assignment options goes beyond what is required to receive an “A” in the course. That is, **you do not need to complete or attempt every assignment**. Rather, you choose which assignments and the total number of assignments you wish to complete on the basis of what interests you and what grade you hope to achieve in the class. While you have options about the kinds of grade items you complete in the course, your success will be dependent on completing different kinds of assignments at different points in the semester.

### “Minor” Items

There are two different kinds of minor grade items for this class: course community engagement and assignments. Course community engagement comes in the form of residential courses, discussion forums, and Zoom-based “book clubs.”

There will be separate assignments each week for English Exegesis and Greek Exegesis students. For Greek students, these assignments are related to Greek grammar, translation, and textual criticism. For English exegesis students, they are usually related to the content and interpretation of the biblical text.

While these assignments are labeled “minor,” they are not minor in importance. Learning best occurs in small increments, and these minor items are meant to facilitate this. Moreover, the course community grade items serve as the basis for establishing human relationships, which are also imperative for learning.

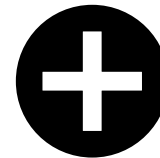


### “Major” Items

There are various major grade item options, including exams, reports, exegetical papers, topical assignments, translations, and others. Detailed instructions for these assignments can be found on the course Moodle page.

These major items are intentionally of various types and are meant to engage different learning styles at different points in the semester. I strongly encourage you to complete different types of major assignments.

The due dates for these assignments vary. Some of them cannot be completed until later in the semester, after certain material and concepts have been learned. Others can be completed at any point in the semester. Moreover, some of these assignments have hard deadlines, while others can be completed up until the end of the semester. Please refer to the course Moodle page for deadline information on these assignments.



## Final Exegetical Paper

All students have the option to write a final exegetical paper. Successful completion of this paper counts for three major grade items. Thus it is technically a sub-category of the “major grade items” category.

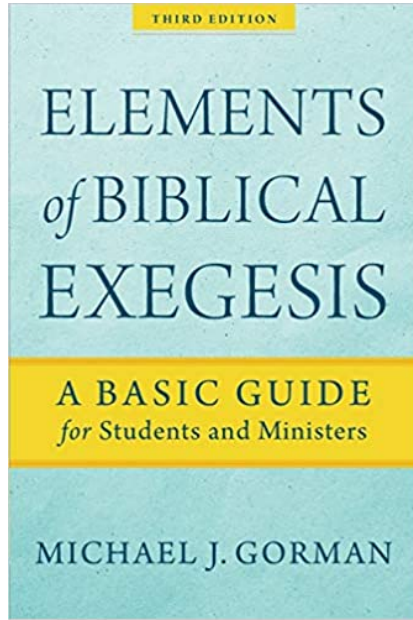
The exegetical paper represents the culmination of the student’s learning in the course and thus requires them to consider the passage’s historical and cultural contexts, its literary context, its contemporary relevance, and to consult several articles and commentaries on the passage.



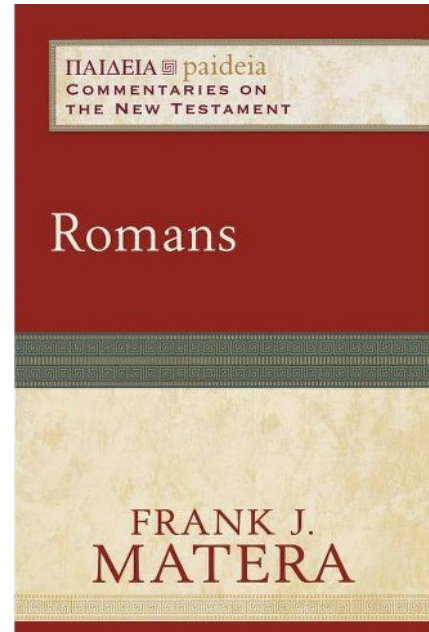


## Required Texts

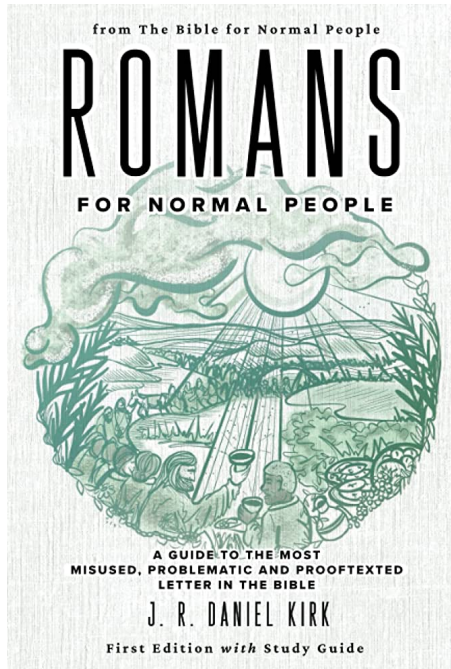
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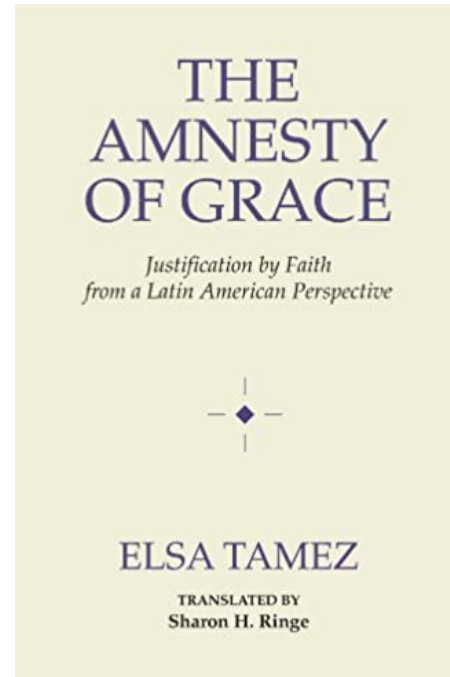
Michael J. Gorman,  
***Elements of Biblical Exegesis* (3rd ed.),**  
Grand Rapids: Baker Academic (2020).  
ISBN: 1540960315.



Frank J. Matera,  
***Romans (Paideia Commentary Series)*,**  
Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press (2010).  
ISBN: 0801031893.



J. R. Daniel Kirk,  
***Romans for Normal People: A Guide to the Most Misused, Problematic, and Prooftexted Letter in the Bible*,**  
Perkiomenville, PA: The Bible for Normal People (2022). ISBN: 1736468626.



Elsa Tamez (Author); Sharon H. Ringe  
(Translator)  
***The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective*,**  
Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock (2002).  
ISBN: 1579108652.



## Commentaries (Choose One or More)

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Each student will choose one of the following commentaries on Romans. Reading from this commentary will inform his or her forum posts. The intention is that several different interpretive perspectives will be brought into the online discussion on a given portion of Romans. Of course students may purchase more than one of these commentaries (and this is recommended for the purpose of future preaching, teaching, and research), but students will only be responsible to read and report on one of these commentaries for the purposes of the course.

Greek Exegesis students **\*must\*** choose a commentary from the second list. The reason for this is that the commentaries in the second list presume knowledge of Greek and attend to issues of translation and grammar to a much greater extent than the commentaries in the first list. English Exegesis students may choose a commentary from either list but should be aware that commentaries in the second list presume a working knowledge of Greek.

### English Exegesis Students:

Achtemeier, Paul J. *Romans*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Bird, Michael F. *Romans*. Story of God Biblical Commentary. Zondervan Academic, 2016.

Byrne, Brendan. *Sacra Pagina: Romans*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007.

Jewett, Robert. *Romans: A Short Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013.

Keck, Leander E. *Romans*. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005.

Moo, Douglas J. *Romans: The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2000.

### Greek Exegesis Students:

Dunn, James D. G. *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans*. 2 vols. Waco: Thomas Nelson, 1988.

Jewett, Robert. *Romans: A Commentary*. Edited by Eldon Jay Epp. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006.

Hultgren, Arland J. *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.

Longenecker, Richard N. *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017.

Moo, Douglas J. *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. 2nd ed. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018.

Thielman, Frank S. *Romans*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018.

## Optional Texts

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As part of the grade requirements for the class, English Exegesis students may complete an assignment on one or more of the following texts. This being the case, these books are not strictly required, but will be necessary to access if a student chooses to complete an assignment associated with one of these texts:

- Anderson, Garwood P. *Paul's New Perspective: Charting a Soteriological Journey*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016.
- Bird, Michael F., ed. *Four Views on the Apostle Paul*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2012.
- Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. *Our Mother Saint Paul*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.
- Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. *When in Romans*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018.
- Grieb, A. Katherine. *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defense of God's Righteousness*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- Marchal, Joseph A., ed. *Studying Paul's Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012.
- McKnight, Scot. *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel of Peace in the Midst of Empire*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019.
- Smith, Eric C. *Paul the Progressive?: The Compassionate Christian's Guide to Reclaiming the Apostle as an Ally*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2019.
- Stubbs, Monya A. *Indebted Love: Paul's Subjection Language in Romans*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013.
- Westerholm, Stephen. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Works, Carla Safford. *The Least of These: Paul and the Marginalized*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020.
- Zetterholm, Magnus. *Approaches to Paul: A Student's Guide to Recent Scholarship*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009.