



Topic
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The Apostle Paul

Course Guidebook

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Emory University



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Luke Timothy Johnson is the Robert W. Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia. Born in 1943 and from the age of 19 to 28 a Benedictine Monk, he received a B.A. in philosophy from Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, an M.Div. in theology from Saint Meinrad School of Theology in Indiana, and an M.A. in religious studies from Indiana University, before earning a Ph.D. in New Testament from Yale University in 1976.

Professor Johnson taught at Yale Divinity School from 1976 to 1982, and at Indiana University from 1982 to 1992, before accepting his current position. He is the author of 19 books, including *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (2nd edition, 1998), which is used widely as a textbook. He has also published several hundred articles and reviews. He is currently at work on a number of books, including a major monograph on the influence of Greco-Roman religion on Christianity.

Professor Johnson has taught undergraduates, as well as M.A. and Ph.D. students. At Indiana University, he received the President's Award for Distinguished Teaching, was elected a member of the Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching, and won the Brown Derby and Student Choice awards for teaching. At Emory, he has twice received the "On Eagle's Wings Excellence in Teaching" award. In 1997–1998, he was a Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar, in which capacity he spoke at college campuses across the country.

Professor Johnson is married to Joy Randazzo. They share seven children, nine grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and a Yorkshire Terrier named Bailey. Professor Johnson is also the lecturer in the course called *Early Christianity: The Experience of the Divine* for the Teaching Company.

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The Apostle Paul

Scope:

One of the most fascinating—some would say repelling—figures in the religious history of the West, Paul the Apostle continues to find champions and detractors, sometimes in surprising places. Because his letters became part of the Christian Bible, Paul had the misfortune of becoming memorialized as Scripture. His writings have been endlessly scoured as sources for Christian doctrine and morals. His personality has been just as endlessly analyzed as one of the great converters (or turncoats, depending on one's perspective) in history. His views on women, slaves, and homosexuals continue to be contentious.

What is most surprising in all the controversy Paul creates is how little attention is actually paid to the things with which he was most concerned: the stability and integrity of the tiny Christian communities to which he wrote letters. The scope of this course focuses attention precisely to these letters to learn something about Paul in the context of early Christianity. What were the problems with which his readers had to deal? What were the ways in which Paul characteristically dealt with his communities? How did his letters themselves sometimes create as many problems as they solved? Why was Paul a figure at once highly defined, yet strangely ambiguous? By reading his letters as individual literary compositions, we begin to hear Paul's voice fresh, speaking to real-life situations and genuine community crises. We read Paul not as Holy Scripture and not as systematic theology but as the catch-as-catch-can moral instruction of new communities by their founder and pastor.

Such reading yields a picture of Paul that is far more complex than the positive or negative stereotypes, because the picture is drawn from life, rather than Holy Writ. We find a Paul who struggles to establish the authority to teach even in a community that he has founded (1 Corinthians), then finds its allegiance slipping away just as he is engaged in the greatest act of his career (2 Corinthians). We discover a Paul who writes to relieve a community's mind (1 Thessalonians) only to find that he has enflamed its imagination (2 Thessalonians). We appreciate a Paul who seeks to realize an egalitarian ideal, and succeeds on some fronts (Galatians), but has only ambiguous results (Philemon) and undoubtedly fails (1 Timothy) on others. We see a Paul who sets out to raise money for a future trip and ends up

creating a theological masterwork (Romans), who finds himself captive in Roman prisons, yet able to reach into ever greater extensions of his mission (Colossians, Ephesians). Perhaps most remarkably, we learn the heart of a Paul who became known as the Apostle of the Gentiles, yet to the end of his days, yearned for the saving of his own Jewish people.

The only requirement for this course is the willingness to work with Paul as he thinks his way through the problems he faces. The payoff is learning why Paul had such an enormous influence through these letters and remains a vital force in the religious life of millions.