

An Introduction to the Letters of Paul

The Occasional Nature, Composition,
and Style of the Pauline Epistles

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Towards a Better Understanding of Paul's Writings

- Be aware of **the order** they were written
- Understand the “**occasional nature**” of his writings
- Know the **genres** or types of letters they represent
- Be aware of the **structure of a letter**; something of **how it was composed, sent, and read**; **rhetorical styles**

The Order of Paul's Letters

A.D. 45-47 "First" Missionary Journey
(better First Gentile Mission; after visit to Jerusalem and the famine in A.D. 44 dated by Claudius' reign)

A.D. 49 Jerusalem Council

A.D. 49-52 "Second" Missionary Journey

A.D. 50 Paul in Corinth
(dated by governorship of Gallio)

A.D. 53-58 "Third" Missionary Journey

A.D. 58 **Jerusalem visit and arrest**

A.D. 60-63 Voyage to and imprisonment in Rome

The Order of Paul's Letters

A.D. 45-47 "First" Missionary Journey

A.D. 49 Jerusalem Council

A.D. 49-52 "Second" Missionary Journey

First Group (AD 50-51)
1 and 2 Thess

Concern about Second Coming

A.D. 53-58 "Third" Missionary Journey

Second Group (AD 55-57)
1 and 2 Cor, Gal
Romans

Opposition from "Judaizers"

A.D. 58 **Jerusalem visit and arrest**

Third Group (AD 60-62)
Philip, Col, Eph,
Philem, Heb

Rising influence of Greek philosophy

A.D. 60-63? Voyage to and imprisonment in Rome

Fourth Group (c. AD 64?)
Titus, 1 and 2 Tim

Concern about Church order and governance

The Order of Paul's Letters

A.D. 45-47 <u>"First" Missionary Journey</u>		Gal? (before AD 49)
A.D. 49 Jerusalem Council		
A.D. 49-52 <u>"Second" Missionary Journey</u>	<u>First Group (AD 50-51)</u> 1 and 2 Thess	1 and 2 Thess (AD 50-51)
A.D. 53-58 <u>"Third" Missionary Journey</u>	<u>Second Group (AD 55-57)</u> 1 and 2 Cor, Gal Romans	Galatians (c. AD 55) Philip, Philem (c. AD 56) 1 Cor (AD 56-57) 2 Cor (AD 57) Rom (AD 57-58)
A.D. 58 Jerusalem visit and arrest		
	<u>Third Group (AD 60-62)</u> Philip, Col, Eph, Philem, Heb	Col, Eph (AD 61-63)
A.D. 60-63? <u>Voyage to and imprisonment in Rome</u>	<u>Fourth Group (c. AD 64?)</u> Titus, 1 and 2 Tim	
<u>"Second Career?"</u> <u>Second Imprisonment?</u>		Titus, 1 Tim (AD 65) 2 Tim (AD 66-68)

Occasional Nature

- Thessalonians
 - Christians obsessed with the Second Coming
- Galatians
 - Gentile Christians who were being led astray by "Judaizers"
 - Explains Paul's discussion of faith (of Jesus Christ) versus works (of the law)
- Corinthians
 - Problems with factionalism, doctrine, and behavior
- Romans
 - An introduction of Paul and his theology

Types of Letters

- **Real Letters** - addressing practical and theological issues relevant to particular communities
 - 1-2 Thess, Gal, Philip, Phil, 1-2 Cor, Rom
- **Epistles/Encyclicals** - more stylized literary works in letter format
 - “circular letters” intended for broader audiences (1 & 2 Peter, Jude; perhaps **Colossians** and **Ephesians** foreshadow)
- **Church Orders** (Regulatory Letters or “**Pastoral Epistles**”)
 - collections of instructions for the practical organization of religious communities (**1 Tim, Titus**)
- **Testaments**
 - a document that gives a dying person's last wishes and instructions for his/her successors (**2 Tim & 2 Peter**)

Structure of a Pauline Letter

- **Opening Formula**
 - Address noting **sender** and **recipient** (a local church, members of a church, or an individual)
 - Example: “**Paul**, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, **unto the church of the Thessalonians** which is in God the Father and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ: **Grace be unto you**, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess 1:1)
 - Paul changes the typical Hellenistic greeting *chairein* to *charis* (grace)
 - Rather than refer to his earthly household (e.g., “Paul, son of X, of Tarsus . . .”) he identifies himself with a new household (e.g., “Paul, a servant or apostle of Jesus Christ . . .”) (1-2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Col, 1-2 Tim, Tit)
- **Thanksgiving** (all but Galatians and Titus)
 - Paul expands the usual Hellenistic or Roman reference to the gods with a lengthy prayer of thanks and blessing
 - **The absence of a Thanksgiving in Galatians is striking—Paul is angry!**
- **Body**
 - Teaching (Pauline Indicative)
 - Admonition (Pauline Imperative or *Paranesis*)
- **Closing Formula**
 - Final Blessing
 - Greetings
 - Peace Wish
 - Postscripts

Writing an Ancient Letter

See E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing* and Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul the Letter-Writer*

- Paul did not sit alone in a quiet study writing his letters . . .
- The role of the **secretary**
 - Most ancient letters were written by **professional scribes**
 - Some were directly **dictated**, others **followed standard set forms**
 - Some scribes **rewrote the ideas of the "author" into more polished style**
 - Letters went through several drafts before the author applied his seal
- The **cost** of the finished letter included both the cost of the papyrus and secretarial labor (Richards, 169)
 - According to some calculations, **Romans (979 mss. lines) would have cost \$2,275 in today's dollars!**
 - Even Philemon (44 lines) would have cost \$101
- Paul's letters frequently included **co-writers** and **missionary companions who left greetings at the end** and probably reviewed the letter and added ideas
- Letters were delivered by **private carriers**
 - Paul frequently used missionary companions
 - The carrier usually **read the letter aloud** to the audience and would be able to clarify meaning and add nuance
 - **Performance** (facial expression, tone, gesture, and voice) were part of the reading process

Rhetoric and Style in Paul's letters

- Rhetoric: the art of persuasion
 - How to write persuasively and artfully
- **Forensic or judicial oratory**
 - Concerned with the past, a middle style to defend a position
 - **Galatians** used this style, and much of the body of Paul's letter is formatted as a court speech defending "his" gospel, especially the idea of justification by the faith of Jesus Christ and not the works of the law
- **Deliberative or hortatory oratory**
 - Concerned with the future, a straightforward style meant to teach and encourage change
 - **1 Corinthians** uses this style to correct the different problems in Corinth and encourage unity
- **Epideictic or display oratory**
 - Concerned with the present, a grand style meant to introduce a praise a person or position
 - **Romans** uses this style as Paul introduces "his" gospel and gain the support of the Roman saints

Paul's Letters, Then and Now

- Frequent personal greetings at the end of many of the letters remind us—such as 26 individuals and 5 groups in Rom 16:3-16—remind us that these were actual letters written to real people
- Nevertheless, Paul's final expression of praise in this letter emphasizes the enduring nature of the apostle's testimony and message
 - *“Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.” (Romans 16:25-27)*