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THE EPISTOLARY FORM IN THE

NEW TESTAMENT: 2 JOHN

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INTRODUCTION

Twenty of the twenty-seven New Testament books are letters. Of the remaining seven, Acts and Revelation contain letters within them. William Doty remarks:

Even if we exclude additional materials which are letters in only part of their formal structure--Hebrews, James--it can still be seen that the dominant literary form found within the Christian canon is the letter.¹

With this in mind, the study of the epistle is unavoidably a large part of New Testament exegesis.

This paper will address the subject of the study of epistolary form within the New Testament. Due to the length of the history of research, this section has been separated as an independent chapter. This history of research is surveyed in chapter one, providing some of the key personalities and works in the field of epistolary research. Chapter two then proceeds with an overview of the form of the ancient Greek letter and its influence upon the early Christian letter which appears in the New Testament. Finally, chapter three presents an exegesis of 2 John, which will further discuss the form of the New Testament epistle.

¹William G. Doty, Letters in Primitive Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 19.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF EPISTOLARY RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter will seek to provide a basic overview of the history of modern epistolary research from the early 1900s to the present. In this process, some of the major works and scholars that have contributed to the study of the New Testament epistle will be mentioned. This history will be divided into four main sections: 1) the beginnings of modern epistolary research, 2) the period following from the 1920s to the 1960s, 3) the outburst of study in the 1970s, and 4) current research.

Light For a New Era

Adolf Deissmann's Licht vom Osten: Das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte der hellenistisch-römischen Welt, published in 1908, ushered in the modern era of epistolary research by utilizing recent archaeological discoveries that yielded new tools for evaluating ancient writings.¹ Before these discover-

¹Adolf Deissmann, Licht vom Osten: Das Neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte der hellenistisch-römischen Welt. 4th ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1923). Chapter one, 9-47, discusses these archaeological finds in three categories: a) "Inschriften auf Stein, Metall usw.," b) "Texten auf Papyrus (und Pergament)," and c) "Texten auf Tonscherben."

ies, the archaeological findings consisted mainly of inscriptions and documents which had been preserved because of their literary quality.² Many of these new papyri from Egypt were non-literary and provided examples of writings from everyday life covering a period from the 4th century B. C. to the Byzantine era.³ The papyri consisted of legal documents such as lease contracts, invoices and receipts, marriage contracts, bills of divorce, wills, etc., as well as letters, school books, spell books, horoscopes, and diaries.⁴

²Stanley K. Stowers, Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 17.

³Deissmann, 29.

⁴Ibid.

Deissmann compared these papyri to the New Testament writings and discovered that the language of the New Testament was closer to the language in these everyday ancient writings than in the literary papyri of Plato and Demosthenes, which had been the frame of reference for earlier scholars.⁵ This distinction between literary writings and non-literary writings was stressed by Deissmann with his differentiation between the letter and the epistle.⁶ The letter he defined as non-literary, personal correspondence intended to be private and not for any public use; the epistle, on the other hand, was an artistic form of literature

⁵Stowers, 17.

⁶Deissmann, 193-208.

such as a dialogue, a speech or a drama, and was intended for the public.⁷

Deissmann considered all of Paul's letters to be of the non-literary letter category stating, "Der Apostel Paulus ist Briefschreiber, nicht Epistolograph,"⁸ as well as 2 and 3 John.⁹ The letters of James, Peter, and Jude, as well as Hebrews, he classified as literary epistles; 1 John was neither, but was rather "eine religiöse Diatribe."¹⁰ Though this division represented Deissmann's main emphasis, his lasting contribution was a comparative study of New Testament epistles with ancient non-canonical letters. His insistence on the letter-epistle distinction, though influential in epistolary studies, has been considered limited and confusing by many scholars currently working in this field.

For example, John L. White said of Deissmann's distinction between letter and epistle:

Unfortunately, he emphasized the similarity of the two bodies of data unduly, with the result that he identified Paul's letters as belonging to the non-literary tradition. In fact, nothing in the papyri resembles Paul's letters as a whole, either in length or in style.¹¹

⁷Ibid., 194-5.

⁸Ibid., 203.

⁹Ibid., 206.

¹⁰Ibid., 206-7.

¹¹John L. White, "Saint Paul and the Apostolic Letter Tradition," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 45 (1983): 434.

Stanley Stowers highlights three major limitations to Deissmann's approach.¹² First, the papyri from Egypt provide only a glimpse of life in a few small Egyptian towns and these towns "were rather remote from the life of the great centers of Hellenistic culture such as the cities of Paul."¹³ Secondly, the distinction between private and public letters is "a distinction more appropriate to modernity than antiquity," due to the fact that Greco-Roman politics encompassed a private sphere of friends and family, and Paul's letters had a public nature in that they were read aloud, copied, and circulated.¹⁴ Finally, Deissmann's distinction was based upon the standards set up by the ancient cultures themselves, while in actuality, all the letters have a literary quality which follow letter-writing customs; therefore, the historian should not adopt "the standards of any one time or place in such a way as to cause blindness to the broader literary culture of a society."¹⁵ David Aune also observes:

Deissmann's influential distinction between letters and epistles has obscured rather than clarified the spectrum of possibilities that separated the short personal letter from the literary letters of antiquity. There are, for example, no really private letters among Paul's authentic letters. Nor was Deissmann sensitive to stylistic differences between papyrus letters and Pauline letters. The letters of Paul and Seneca, for instance, exhibit a dialogical style quite different from anything found in

¹²Stowers, 18-19.

¹³Ibid., 19.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 19-20.

papyrus letters.¹⁶

Though many of Deissmann's conclusions have not been maintained in the field of epistolary research, his procedure of comparing these ancient non-canonical letters and writings to the New Testament letters has been a major contribution to the modern study of the New Testament epistle.

Five Decades of Research

Deissmann's influence upon epistolary research set a new direction for the genre. However, with the emergence of Formgeschichte in the 1920s and 1930s, New Testament scholars concentrated largely on Gospel research, while important works on the epistles were sparse until the 1970s when epistolary research erupted. Despite the lack of volume during this period, several noteworthy and influential works were produced between Deissmann and the 1970s.

¹⁶David E. Aune, The New Testament in Its Literary Environment (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 160.

Henry Meecham, greatly influenced by Deissmann, focused his study of the Egyptian papyri on the private, non-literary letters and compared them to New Testament letters.¹⁷ While agreeing with Deissmann's general observations on the letter and epistle, he did not agree with the sharp division that left little room for

¹⁷Henry G. Meecham, Light From Ancient Letters (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1923). Meecham, 31, dates the discovery of the Oxyrhynchus papyri at 1897.

letters which were more of an "intermediate species."¹⁸ He also did not agree that all of Paul's letters were uniformly of the non-literary letter variety.¹⁹

Meecham's work, published in 1923, is representative of the beginnings of study on the formal elements of ancient letters and New Testament letters.²⁰ Meecham states that the private letters in the papyri "followed a regular and established order and were shaped in a well-defined way."²¹ This order he outlined as follows:

1. Opening address or salutations.
2. Thanksgiving and prayer for addressee.
3. The substance of the letter containing directions and personal news, etc.
4. Farewell greetings and closing prayer.²²

His comparative study with the Pauline epistles revealed a similar structure, representing the direction of future studies.

¹⁸Ibid., 38.

¹⁹Ibid., 38, 101, 109-112.

²⁰Ibid., 112-27.

²¹Ibid., 113.

²²Ibid., 113.

Appearing the same year as Meecham's work, Francis Xavier J. Exler provided a thorough comparison of formulas present primarily in the openings and closings of a number of papyri.²³ Exler's original objective had been to find the origin of the

²³Francis Xavier J. Exler, The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter of the Epistolary Papyri (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1976). This was originally published in 1923.

Greek-letter form, yet he discovered that the material present could not provide conclusions for any origin.²⁴ What Exler did provide was a source book of quotes from various papyri that demonstrated the formulas employed in ancient letters and demonstrated the well-established format present in documents spanning several centuries.²⁵

²⁴Ibid., 11-13.

²⁵Ibid., chapters I-IV.

Further discussion of the formula of the ancient letter appeared in Otto Roller's Das Formular der paulinischen Briefe, published in 1933, which also provided a comparative study between the ancient letters and Paul's letters.²⁶ Roller compared the style and form of these letters continuing with the same basic outline, yet he provided a further analysis with a breakdown of the Praescript, or opening address.²⁷ He identified three components: the Superscriptio (sender), the Adscriptio (addressee), and the Salutatio (greeting).²⁸ In his examination of the body of the letter, he focused upon the opening and closing devises, as well a brief look at the Gesundheitswunsch and the Proskynemaformel.²⁹ Concerning the closing material, or Eschatokoll, he fo-

²⁶Otto Roller, Das Formular der paulinischen Briefe (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1933).

²⁷Ibid., 57-62.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 62-68.

cused primarily on the Schlußgruß.³⁰ Roller's work provided a detailed analysis of these components in the ancient letters, aiding greatly the study of the Prescript. His study represents the research which served as the impetus for much of the later epistolary research.

In 1939, Paul Schubert provided an analysis of the Pauline Thanksgiving stating, "these thanksgivings have not yet been studied comprehensively. The present study is a first attempt to fill the gap."³¹ Schubert observed that all the Pauline letters except Galatians contain a "thanksgiving" immediately following the opening of the letter and he sought to determine whether this was a component of Greek epistolary form, or whether it was borrowed from liturgical sources.³² He concluded that the thanksgiving, although "formally and functionally superior" with Paul, was a genuine Hellenistic element of letter writing.³³ Stowers comments that Schubert's work "has shown how much can be learned from studying epistolary formulas," and consequently "may explain the fixation of New Testament epistolary research on the openings and conclusions of Paul's letters."³⁴

³⁰Ibid., 68-78.

³¹Paul Schubert, Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 20 (Berlin: Topelmann, 1939), v.

³²Ibid., 3.

³³Ibid., 179-85.

³⁴Stowers, 21.

In 1955, a form-critical approach by Hartwig Thyen examined the influence of the Jewish-Hellenistic homily upon various writings including various canonical and non-canonical letters.³⁵ He maintained that the Jewish synagogue homily influenced the way in which Paul composed the body of his letters.³⁶ Thyen also explored the form and composition of the Parenesis in the homily, which included a brief analysis of the Haustafel.³⁷

³⁵Hartwig Thyen, Der Stil der Jüdisch-Hellenistischen Homilie, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1955).

³⁶Ibid., 59-63.

³⁷Ibid., 85-110.

Research focusing primarily on the papyri themselves appeared in 1956 with Heikki Koskenniemi's Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefs bis 400 n. Chr.³⁸ Koskenniemi dealt briefly with epistolary theory and rhetoric from Artemon, the editor of Aristotle's letters.³⁹ He also examined the student handbooks of Demetrius and Libanius which he concluded represented different styles for different occasions of letter writing.⁴⁰ He also studied the contents of the form of the letters which were primarily private family letters.⁴¹ One interest-

³⁸Heikki Koskenniemi, Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefs bis 400 n. Chr. (Helsinki: Akateeminen Kirjakauppa, 1956).

³⁹Ibid., 24-27.

⁴⁰Ibid., 62.

⁴¹Ibid., 104-14.

ing feature of the family letter is the προσκύνημα formula of the sender of the letter praying on behalf of the addressee.⁴²

In 1962, Beda Rigaux stated that the commentaries on the epistles had become outdated and called for more work to be done with the existing papyri.⁴³ He also noted how the Pauline literature had not received anywhere near the attention as the Gospels in form-critical studies and set forth a brief attempt at such that was "no more than a synthesis with no intention or pretense to exhaust the subject."⁴⁴ The areas covered by Rigaux include 1) the literary form of the epistle; 2) the thanksgiving; 3) autobiographical sections; 4) the use of the kerygma; 5) the use of the Old Testament; 6) rhetoric; 7) the apocalyptic; 8) blessings and doxologies; 9) rhythmic prose and hymns; and 10) the Parenesis (particularly the Haustafeln).⁴⁵

⁴²Ibid., 113. This is also briefly mentioned in Roller, 63-65.

⁴³Beda Rigaux, The Letters of St. Paul: Modern Studies, ed. and trans. Stephen Yonick (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1968).

⁴⁴Ibid., 117.

⁴⁵Ibid., 115-46.

The preceding has looked at a few of the important works that appeared during a period when the majority of New Testament research focused elsewhere. However, the important works discussed above helped pave the way for later epistolary research. The studies varied in approach, yet they represent the growth and

development of research which would eventually "take off" in the 1970s.

The Unification and Outburst of Study

In the early years of the 1970s, new attention was given to the study of the New Testament epistle. The trend of the comparative study between ancient non-canonical letters and the New Testament letters not only continued, but expanded its area of study beyond Greek letters. Two significant studies signaled the beginning of new research in the 1970s: Letters in Primitive Christianity by William G. Doty and the work of the Ancient Epistolography Group.⁴⁶

Doty not only considered the prior epistolary research to be "scattered and fragmentary," he also felt the need for a "comprehensive treatment of the epistle" in English.⁴⁷ In his book published in 1973, Doty brought much of the previous research together, presenting an overview of the various approaches that had embodied epistolary research. The book represents one of the best studies of the ancient letter up to that time and continues to be among the best resources in the field.

⁴⁶William G. Doty, Letters in Primitive Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973); John L. White, ed. Studies in Ancient Letter Writing, Semeia 22 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981).

⁴⁷Doty, Letters, ix.

Doty began with a survey of Greco-Roman letters, dealing briefly with the theorists and handbooks, and a look at the char-

acteristics of Hellenistic and early Christian letters.⁴⁸ His focus then shifted to the Pauline letters where he presented the basic form of the letters of Paul.⁴⁹ The outline consisted of three main sections: the introductory section, the main body, and the concluding section which can be laid out as follows:

Opening (sender, addressee, greeting)
 Thanksgiving or Blessing (often with intercession and/or eschatological climax)
 Body (introductory formulae; often having an eschatological conclusion and/or and indication of future plans)
 Paraenesis
 Closing (formulas benedictions and greetings; sometimes mention of the writing process).⁵⁰

The comparison of Doty's outline and that of Meecham's⁵¹ shows not only the consistency of epistolary research through the decades, but also the broadening understanding within the research.

⁴⁸Ibid., 1-19.

⁴⁹Ibid., 21-47.

⁵⁰Ibid., 27.

⁵¹Above, 7.

Doty then observed some of the elements found within the New Testament epistle such as stylistic and rhetorical features, structural features, formal and generic traits, and the use of traditional materials such as liturgy, hymns and creeds, as well as the Old Testament.⁵² Other elements discussed were autobiography, apocalyptic, catalogues and lists (including Haustafeln and Gemeindetafeln), catechesis, confessional formulas, hymnic

⁵²Doty, Letters, 49-55.

materials, judgment forms, and a brief mention of other forms).⁵³

Finally, Doty looked at early Christian letters including Post-Pauline letters.⁵⁴

The Work of the Ancient Epistolography Group, beginning in 1973, was a joint effort of several scholars to examine not only the Greek letter form, but also Cuneiform, Aramaic, and Hebrew letter forms.⁵⁵ The group leader, John L. White, wrote that he and other scholars working in the various areas of epistolary research had felt that their work was being conducted "in a vacuum."⁵⁶ In 1973, he and a group of scholars petitioned the Society of Biblical Literature's Program Committee to meet concerning ancient letter writing and eventually they were granted permission to form into a program unit in 1975.⁵⁷ The study continued from 1975 until 1979, and the results were published in Semeia 22 in 1981.⁵⁸

Current Research

⁵³Ibid., 55-63.

⁵⁴Ibid., 65-81.

⁵⁵The results of the Ancient Epistolography Group are recorded in several essays compiled in Semeia 22 (1981).

⁵⁶John L. White, "The Ancient Epistolography Group in Retrospect" Semeia 22 (1981): 1.

⁵⁷Ibid., 2, 4.

⁵⁸Ibid., 6.

The scholars that were members of the Ancient Epistolography Group are also some of the leading personalities in current

epistolary research. The group consisted of John L. White, the foremost American scholar in Hellenistic and New Testament epistolary studies, F. Brent Knutson, who contributed a study on Cuneiform letters, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, an authority on ancient Aramaic epistolography, Paul E. Dion, also working with ancient Aramaic letters, and Chan-Hie Kim, who contributed an index of the letters in the Greek papyri.⁵⁹ The leader of the group and the editor of Semeia 22, John L. White, is one of the leading scholars in the field of epistolary research and his book, Light From Ancient Letters, is a source-book containing several Greek texts and their translations.⁶⁰ The book also provides one of the most helpful surveys on Greek letter writing.⁶¹

⁵⁹The accompanying articles all appear in Semeia 22: John L. White, "The Ancient Epistolography Group in Retrospect;" idem, "The Greek Documentary Letter Tradition Third Century B. C. E. to Third Century C. E.;" F. Brent Knutson, "Cuneiform Letters and Social Conventions;" Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Aramaic Epistolography;" Paul E. Dion, "The Aramaic 'Family Letter' and Related Epistolary Forms in other Oriental Languages and in Hellenistic Greek;" idem, "Aramaic Words for 'Letter';" Chan-Hie Kim, "Index of Greek Papyrus Letters."

⁶⁰John L. White, Light From Ancient Letters (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

⁶¹Ibid., 189-220.

Abraham J. Malherbe has contributed works containing ancient Greco-Roman source material.⁶² His Ancient Epistolary Theo-

⁶²Abraham J. Malherbe, Ancient Epistolary Theorists, Society of Biblical Literature: Sources for Biblical Study 19, ed. Bernard Brandon Scott (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); idem, Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook, Library of Early Christianity 4 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986).

rists contains primary source material of ancient writers on the subject of letter writing. This book gives insight into the way letter writing was practiced and taught from around the third century B. C. through the third and fourth centuries A. D.

In The New Testament in Its Literary Environment, David Aune devotes chapters 5 and 6 to ancient letter writing.⁶³ These chapters represent some of the current trends in epistolary research. He has also edited a book on the topic of Greco-Roman writings and New Testament writings which contains various chapters on the different elements of the ancient letter.⁶⁴

Klaus Berger's form-critical analysis of the material in the New Testament does not focus on the New Testament epistle, yet examines the forms of material that is found in the epistles.⁶⁵ His most helpful material for epistolary research may appear in his examination of Parenesis.⁶⁶ He also discusses various other topics which include lists and catalogues, hymns and prayers, apocalyptic material, and travel reports.⁶⁷

⁶³David E. Aune, The New Testament in Its Literary Environment (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987).

⁶⁴David E. Aune, ed., Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: Selected Forms and Genres, Society of Biblical Literature: Sources for Biblical Study 21, ed. Bernard Brandon Scott (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

⁶⁵Klaus Berger, Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments (Heidelberg: Quelle and Meyer, 1984).

⁶⁶Ibid., 121-220.

⁶⁷Ibid., 221-360.

A fairly recent work by Franz Schnider and Werner Stenger examines the forms within the New Testament letters in three main categories: 1) der Briefanfang; 2) der Briefschluß; and 3) der Anhang.⁶⁸ The elements of the opening formula which are examined include the Prescript, the Thanksgiving, and the Selbstempfehlung (a kind of testimonial).⁶⁹ The discussion on the Briefschluß contains sections of the definition and macrostructure of the Briefschluß, the Schlußparänese and the postscript.⁷⁰ The last section of the Anhang discusses its basic epistolary formula.⁷¹ This book represents some of the current research taking place in epistolary studies.

⁶⁸Franz Schnider and Werner Stenger. Studien zum neutestamentlichen Briefformular, New Testament Tools and Studies 11, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987).

⁶⁹Ibid., 3-68.

⁷⁰Ibid., 71-167.

⁷¹Ibid., 168-81.

Finally, Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity by Stanley K. Stowers is one of the best overviews of ancient Hellenistic epistolography currently available.⁷² Stowers provides chapters on the modern study of ancient letters, the social setting for the ancient letters, the settings for writing letters, the role of philosophy in letter writing, and the letters in Jewish and

⁷²Stanley K. Stowers, Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986).

early Christian communities.⁷³ The second half of his book surveys the different types of letters and how these types functioned in society.⁷⁴ Stower's book is one of the major contributions to the current study of the ancient letter.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a general overview of the history of epistolary research. Current study has continued in the vein of Deissmann by comparing the forms and functions of ancient letters with those of the New Testament. The analysis of the form of the New Testament epistle has broadened, yet this analysis remains primarily focused upon the Pauline epistles. The studies on the sub-categories within the Prescript, Body, and Conclusio have in no way exhausted the subjects, leaving areas needing further exploration.

⁷³Ibid., 17-47.

⁷⁴Ibid., 51-173.

CHAPTER 2

THE EPISTOLARY FORM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Introduction

This chapter will provide an introduction to the study of the form of the New Testament epistle. Included will be an overview of the hellenistic letter, the influence of Paul upon letter writing, and finally, a brief sketch of the epistolary form in the New Testament. This chapter will focus primarily upon the Greek letter for comparative study due to its direct influence upon the New Testament writers. Paul's letters, for instance, reflect the hellenistic conventions of the letter writing of his day. Besides the possible use of the Shalom greeting from Jewish correspondence, "it is difficult if not impossible to establish any direct lines of borrowing by Paul from Jewish epistolary materials in terms of their form and structure."¹ Therefore, this chapter will be limited to the discussion of the hellenistic epistle in connection with New Testament epistolary study.

Hellenistic Letter Writing

¹Doty, Letters, 22.

The study of ancient Greek letters provides a starting point for the study of New Testament letters. The study of the

ancient papyri is necessarily the first step to provide information on the background, framework, form, and function of the ancient letter in general. White comments, "the characteristic features of the Christian letter tradition would be ill defined, in not undetected, without a working knowledge of ordinary letter writing."² Furthermore, the apostle Paul used the letter writing conventions of his day in his correspondence which leads White to add:

We will not appreciate his use of these conventions, consequently, until they are identified. I am convinced that the documentary letter tradition enables us to identify many stereotyped features of Paul's letters and it provides a basis for understanding the epistolary function of these conventions.³

Therefore, a brief look at the technique in ancient Greek letter writing (primarily the documentary or non-literary letter) will serve as a starting point to the discussion of New Testament letter writing.

Epistolary Theory

²White, Light From Ancient Letters, 20.

³Ibid.

Malherbe's collection of primary source material on the theory of letter writing serves as one of the best resources for understanding ancient epistolary theory.⁴ The writings of the theorists appear in two main categories: writings of the rhetori-

⁴Malherbe, Ancient Epistolary Theorists.

cians, and handbooks that contain example letters.⁵ Concerning the rhetoricians, one of the first and most helpful discussions on letter writing appears in De Elocutione, attributed to Demetrius of Phalerum and dated somewhere between the third century B. C. and the first century A. D.⁶ Demetrius refers to Artemon, who edited Aristotle's letters, and his comments on the dialogical and simple nature of the letter.⁷ His summary statements on Greco-Roman letter writing can be found repeatedly in other writings by Theon, Cicero, Quintillian, and Gregory of Nazianzus.⁸

⁵Ibid., 2-7.

⁶Ibid., 2. Malherbe suggests a date falling between the second and first centuries B. C.

⁷Doty, Letters, 8.

⁸Ibid., 9.

Three main handbooks on letter writing provide examples of the way that the subject may have been taught in the schools: 1) the Bologna Papyrus, PBon 5 (A. D. III-IV), which contains eleven Latin and Greek types of letters; 2) Typoi Epistolikoi (III B. C. - A. D. III), incorrectly attributed to Demetrius of Phalerum, which contains twenty-one epistolary types; and 3) Epistolimaioi Characteres (A. D. IV-VI), attributed to either Libanius or Proclus, which contains forty-one epistolary types.⁹ Due to its dating, the handbook by Pseudo Demetrius provides a good glimpse at the epistolary theory of the first century A. D. Malherbe

⁹White, Ancient Letters, 189-90.

comments that the descriptions of the twenty-one epistolary types "is not so much a collection of sample letters as it is a selection of styles appropriate to different circumstances."¹⁰ The epistolary types discussed by Pseudo Demetrius include: friendly, commendatory, blaming, reproachful, consoling, censorious, admonishing, threatening, vituperative, praising, advisory, supplicatory, inquiring, responding, allegorical, accounting, accusing, apologetic, congratulatory, ironic, and thankful.¹¹

These handbooks provide an idea of how letter writing was taught in the schools, probably the model used in the later secondary stages of education since they "presuppose a knowledge of the basic forms which must therefore have been learned very early in secondary education."¹² Malherbe suggests that the continuity in form and style of the Greek private letter over a period of centuries points to the assumption that instruction in letter writing in the schools was a fundamental teaching.¹³ Therefore, the writings of the theorists provide information on how letter writing was practiced and taught beginning around the third century B. C.

¹⁰Malherbe, Theorists, 4.

¹¹Pseudo Demetrius, "Τύποι Ἐπιστολικοί," in Malherbe, Theorists, 30-41.

¹²Malherbe, Theorists, 6.

¹³Abraham J. Malherbe, "Ancient Epistolary Theorists," Ohio Journal of Religious Studies 5 (1977): 9-10.

As to the reason of the origin of the letter, White states that the earliest letters appear in the form of military or diplomatic letters.¹⁴ "Letter writing was invented because of the writer's need to inform (or to be informed by) those at a distance about something they (or the writer) should know."¹⁵ The letter arose out of a need to communicate over long distances, as a substitute for spoken communication.¹⁶ White also provides this definition and purpose of the letter:

The letter is a written message, which is sent because the corresponding parties are separated spatially. The letter is a written means of keeping oral conversation in motion. Regarding the essential purposes served by letter writing, the maintenance of contact between relatives and friends was sometimes sufficient motivation for writing. But, on most occasions, the sender had a more specific reason for writing; desiring either to disclose/seek information or needing to request/command something of the recipient.¹⁷

Types of Ancient Greek Letters

¹⁴White, Ancient Letters, 192.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., 193.

¹⁷White, "Greek Documentary Letter Tradition," 91.

Categorizing of ancient letters varies from scholar to scholar. Doty discusses six main types of hellenistic letters: 1) the private letter, 2) the business letter, which included contracts and wills, 3) the official letter, used by rulers to convey juristic decisions, 4) the public letter, which sought to influence public opinion, 5) the non-real letter, which were fictitious and possibly the result of school exercises in rhetoric,

and 6) the discursive letter, which were a type of essay.¹⁸ Stowers classifies the letters into six main types somewhat different from Doty: 1) letters of friendship, 2) family letters, 3) letters of praise and blame, 4) letters of exhortation and advice, which has seven sub-types: paraenetic letters, letters of advice, protreptic letters, letters of admonition, letters of rebuke, letters of reproach, and letters of consolation, 5) letters of mediation, and 6) accusing, apologetic, and accounting letters.¹⁹

Aune asserts that Stowers's typology ignores some important types of ancient Greco-Roman correspondence and adds three additional categories: 1) private or documentary letters, 2) official letters, and 3) literary letters, which include letters of recommendation, letter-essays, philosophical letters, novelistic letters, imaginative letters (fictional), and letters embedded into a narrative.²⁰

¹⁸Doty, Letters, 4-8.

¹⁹Stowers, 49-173.

²⁰Aune, The New Testament, 161-69.

Concerning the documentary letter, Aune states that they "constitute the common letter tradition of antiquity, a tradition that remained stable from the Ptolemaic period...to the Roman period," or from around the third century B. C. to the third century A. D. and later.²¹ White focuses upon the documentary letter for his study of Greek letter writing and he divides the documen-

²¹Ibid., 162.

tary letter into four types: 1) letters of introduction and recommendation, 2) letters of petition, 3) family letters, and 4) memoranda.²² He states that the documentary letters are, for the most part, limited to these four types.²³

Greek Epistolary Form

The ancient Greek letter had three highly identifiable sections: the opening, the body, and the closing.²⁴ The formula for the opening is most commonly: A-- to B-- χαίρειν, "A" representing the writer of the letter, and "B", the addressee.²⁵ "A," appears in the nominative case, and "B" in the dative.²⁶ Several different forms occur, the most common being: to B-- from A--, without χαίρειν.²⁷ In this formula, "B" is in the dative and "A" in the genitive.²⁸ The first formula appears mostly in familiar letters, business letters, and official letters, while the second is found in petitions, complaints, and applications.²⁹

²²White, Ancient Letters, 193-7.

²³Ibid., 197.

²⁴Aune, The New Testament, 163.

²⁵Exler, 23.

²⁶Aune, The New Testament, 163.

²⁷Exler, 23.

²⁸Aune, The New Testament, 163.

²⁹Exler, 23.

The formula for the closing consists of either ἔρρωσο, ἔρρωσθε, or a some modification, εὐτύχει or διετύχει, or, the omission of the final greeting altogether.³⁰ In general, familiar letters use some form of ἔρρωσο, petitions and formal complaints use either εὐτύχει or διετύχει, business letters omit the final salutation, and official letters are mixed between using ἔρρωσο or omitting the final greeting.³¹ The combinations of the opening and closing formulas within the various letters are diverse and also help to reveal function and date.³²

³⁰Ibid., 69.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., 70-77.

As for the body of the letter, three different phrases are used in the opening of the body: the ἐρρ'σθαι wish, the ὑγιαίνειν wish, and the ἀσπάσασθαι wish.³³ These phrases could either be joined to the openings or begin the body of the letter.³⁴ Also, depending upon the primary purpose of the letter to either inform or request something, distinctive informational formulas and request formulas are present.³⁵ The final body phrase, the ἐπιμέλου clause, is closely related to the ἐρρ'σθαι wish, for both appear

³³Ibid., 101-13.

³⁴Aune, The New Testament, 163.

³⁵White, Ancient Letters, 207-11.

together in letter writing and disappear about the same time (during the first hundred years of the Christian era).³⁶ The ἀσπάζεσθαι phrase began to be employed around the beginning of Augustus' reign and is most frequent in familiar letters.³⁷ This phrase originally occurred in place of the ὑγιαίνειν wish at the beginning of the body, yet eventually was placed at the end of the body.³⁸ Also appearing, usually in connection with the opening and closing formulas, are prayers of supplication and thanksgiving.³⁹

Though this overview of Greek epistolary form has been brief, it has sought to show that the parts of the ancient Greek letter followed definite formulas. These epistolary conventions survived for centuries, being ingrained into the procedures of letter writing. This provides a short summary of the hellenistic letter which dictated the letter writing practices which influenced the New Testament letters.

The Influence of Paul

³⁶Exler, 116.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Aune, The New Testament, 164.

³⁹White, "Greek Documentary Letter Tradition," 92.

The majority of New Testament epistolary research has focused upon the Pauline epistles. This is due to the fact that Paul's letters "are the earliest and most complex early Christian

letters" and the study of his epistles "can provide a framework for discussing early Christian epistolary formulas."⁴⁰ Albert E. Barnett's Paul Becomes a Literary Influence shows the influence of Paul's letter writing upon subsequent New Testament epistles and other early Christian letters.⁴¹ The Christian letter tradition, defined as a letter of instruction written by a Christian leader to a Christian community, was probably created by Paul whose writings stress his apostolic authority.⁴² "The influence of his precedent is evident in the fact that almost all of the twenty-one New Testament letters support to be written by an apostle," and when the author was not an apostle, some claim to the authority to instruct is included.⁴³

Christian letters are generally longer than the average Greek letter, which may be related to their instructional purpose.⁴⁴ Paul also modified the Greek letter to suit his purposes of writing to a Christian community and he appears to be "responsible for first introducing Christian elements into the epistolary genre and for adapting existing epistolary conventions to express the special interests of the Christian community."⁴⁵ The

⁴⁰Aune, The New Testament, 183.

⁴¹Albert E. Barnett, Paul Becomes a Literary Influence (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941).

⁴²White, Ancient Letters, 19.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

product of his modifications is a form that is detached and distinct from the characteristically Hellenistic and the Hellenistic Jewish letter writing formulas.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Doty, Letters, 22.

Paul's introductory formula modifies the typical A-- to B-- $\chi\alpha\acute{\iota}\rho\epsilon\iota\nu$ opening by changing $\chi\alpha\acute{\iota}\rho\epsilon\iota\nu$ to $\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ and adding the characteristic shalom of the Jewish letter.⁴⁷ Other changes include Paul's inclusion of a thanksgiving, which indicates the purpose of the letter, a benediction in the closing, and various formula changes in the body that fit the instructional nature of his letters.⁴⁸ Due to the creative changes employed by Paul and the subsequent following of his techniques in later Christian letter writing, the study of Paul's letters produces the greatest insight into New Testament epistle writing and presents the best starting point for any study on the epistolary form in the New Testament.

New Testament Epistolary Form

During the course of Unit Five of this semester, various papers on specific formal elements of the New Testament epistle will be presented. In order not to duplicate some of the areas of research in the various papers, this section will display the

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸John L. White, "The Structural Analysis of Philemon: A Point of Departure in the Formal Analysis of the Pauline Letter," in Society of Biblical Literature: 1971 Seminar Papers (Scholars Press, 1971), 27-45.

basic form of the New Testament epistle without providing any great detail. A general concept and overview of the New Testament epistle will be provided.

Doty provides the basic form of the Pauline letters, which appeared in chapter one, but will be displayed again:

Opening (sender, addressee, greeting)
 Thanksgiving or Blessing (often with intercession and/or eschatological climax)
 Body (introductory formulae; often having an eschatological conclusion and/or and indication of future plans)
 Paraenesis
 Closing (formulas benedictions and greetings; sometimes mention of the writing process).⁴⁹

Terence Mullins points out that the thanksgiving formula not only parallels the προσκύνημα formula in the papyri, but exists on its own, though it is rare.⁵⁰ Mullins states that the papyri show that this should not be separated from the body of the letter and therefore feels that it belongs to the body, as an introductory formula to focus on the subject of the letter.⁵¹ Likewise, the Parenesis can be included in the concluding formulas of the body of the letter.⁵²

Possibly the best outline of epistolary form, especially for the purposes of this seminar, appears in Exegeting the New

⁴⁹Doty, Letters, 27.

⁵⁰Terence Y. Mullins, "Formulas in New Testament Epistles," Journal of Biblical Literature 91, 3 (1972): 381-82.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Aune, The New Testament, 191.

Testament: Research Update with Research Bibliography.⁵³ Cranford

presents this outline which displays common elements of both the New Testament and the hellenistic letter:

Praescripto (Prescript)
 Superscripto (Author/Sender)
 Adscripto [Recipient(s)]
 Salutatio (Greeting)
 Proem (Prayer of Thanksgiving and/or Intercession)
 Body
 Opening Formulae
 Request/Appeal
 Disclosure
 Expressions of Astonishment

⁵³Lorin L. Cranford, Exegeting the New Testament: Research Update with Research Bibliography, vol. 2 (Fort Worth, TX: Scripta Publishing, 1991).

Formulae of Compliance
 Formulae of Hearing/Learning
 Formulae of Petition
 Traditions Material
 From worship liturgy
 Hymns
 Confessions of Faith
 Lord Supper Narratives
 From early preaching
 Kerygma
 Verba Christi
 Old Testament References
 Parenesis
 Lists of Vice/Virtues
 Haustafeln (Domestic Codes)
 Gemeindetafeln (Duty Codes)
 Judgment Form
 Closing
 Eschatological Affirmations
 Travelogue/Apostolic Parousia
 Conclusio (Eschatokoll)
 Greetings
 Doxology
 Benediction⁵⁴

⁵⁴Ibid., 62.

This outline provides the best structural display of the form and contents of the New Testament epistle and helps to summarize the information on epistolary form. A summary has been the goal concerning form as this section has sought to provide a general overview of the epistolary form found in the New Testament and serve as an introduction and starting point for the preceding seminar papers.

In conclusion, the study of epistolary form can provide great value in the interpretation of the individual letters. For example, an understanding of the way in which Paul modifies the opening of the letter can give insight into later issues dealt with in the letter.⁵⁵ In the letter to the Galatians, Paul adds a statement of the authority of Jesus Christ in the Praescripto, which is addressed later in the letter, and he omits the thanksgiving which helps indicate the mood in which the letter was written.⁵⁶ In some of Paul's longer letters, knowledge of rhetorical features and transitional formulas will help the exegete to organize the body material of the letter.⁵⁷ Finally, it must be remembered when interpreting epistles that they represent half of a dialogue and are "situational" letters addressed to Chris-

⁵⁵James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 27.

⁵⁶Ibid., 27-28.

⁵⁷Ibid., 28-29.

tian communities discussing specific situations which were relevant for that community.⁵⁸

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide an overview of the study of the ancient and New Testament letters. While this survey has in no way been exhaustive, its aim has been to provide a general perusal in which to serve as a starting point for further research and the other papers for this seminar. Another goal has been to briefly introduce the importance and productiveness of a comparative study of the ancient Greek letter and the New Testament epistle.

⁵⁸Ibid., 29-30.

CHAPTER 3
EXEGESIS OF 2 JOHN

Translation

1 The elder, to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who have known the truth, **2** because of the truth which is abiding in us, and will be with us forever. **3** Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, will be with us in truth and love. **4** I rejoice⁵⁹ exceedingly that I have found your children walking in truth, just as the commandment we received from the Father. **5** And now I ask you, lady, not a new command I am writing to you, but one we have had from the beginning, that we should love one another. **6** And this is love: that we should walk according to his commands; this is the commandment just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. **7** For many deceivers entered into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. **8** Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you might receive a full reward. **9** Everyone who goes too far and does not remain in the teaching of Christ does not have God; the one that persists in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. **10** If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house and do not greet him; **11** for the one who welcomes him shares in his evil works. **12** Having many things to write to you, I wish not to do so with paper and ink, but I hope to come to you and to speak mouth to mouth, so that our joy may be complete. **13** The children of your chosen sister greet you.

Textual Variants

⁵⁹Translated as a present event for the writer, employing the epistolary aorist, see James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, Syntax of New Testament Greek (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1979), 102.

Here, the variant readings in the UBS³ will be noted, and although the NA²⁶ does mention a few more, they will not be dealt with in any degree.⁶⁰ The Textus Receptus, along with * K L P several minuscules syr^h cop^{bo} arm et al., places "κυρίου" before "Ἰησοῦ" in verse 3, which may be an addition, the shorter text supported by both Alexandrian and Western texts.⁶¹ In verse 9, the Textus Receptus K L P the majority of minuscules cop^{bo} eth add "τοῦ Χριστοῦ" after the second "διδάχῃ." Metzger states that this reading is "obviously secondary," the shorter reading supported by * A B Ψ 33 81 1739 vg cop^{sa} et al. The Sixtine vulgate edition of 1590 adds to the end of verse 11, "Ecce praedixi vobis, ut in die domini non confundamini ('Behold, I have preached to you, that in the day of the Lord you may not be confounded')." ⁶² In verse 12, "ἡμ'ν" is replaced by "ὁμ'ν" in several texts including A B 33 81 1739 vg cop^{bo}, which Metzger says "appears to have arisen by scribal assimilation to ὁμῖν and ὁμᾶς earlier in the sentence."⁶³ Finally, verse 13 has several readings, the most

⁶⁰Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren, eds., The Greek New Testament, 3d ed., (corrected), (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1983); idem, Novum Testamentum Graece, 26th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).

⁶¹Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 721.

⁶²Ibid., 722.

⁶³Ibid.

prominent being the addition of "ἀμήν" at the end of the verse supported by the Textus Receptus K L 049 056 0142 many minuscules syr^{ph,h}. The text which does not have "ἀμήν" is supported by * A B P Ψ 33 81 323 1739 1881 vg cop^{sa,bo} et al. Other readings add "ἡ χάρις μεθ' ὑμῶν. ἀμήν," or "ἡ χάρις μετὰ σοῦ. ἀμήν." 465^{mg} adds "τῆς ἐκλεκτῆς τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ."

One reading which carries some doubt in verse 8, "ἀπολέσητε...εἰργασάμεθα...ἀπολάβητε," is noteworthy. Metzger rates this reading {C} due to the doubt of the form "ἐργάζομαι" as either first plural or second plural, in addition to first plural forms of "ἀπόλλυμι" and "ἀπολαμβάνω" in some readings. The presence of the first plural form between two second plural forms gives the sentence a particular shade of meaning that would be different otherwise. Since there is more certainty as to the second plural forms of "ἀπόλλυμι" and "ἀπολαμβάνω" {B}, the doubt rests upon the first plural form of "ἐργάζομαι," thus the reason for charting this variant reading in Appendix 4.

Expositional Outline

The body of the New Testament epistle provides some of the most fertile material in the New Testament in which to derive a contemporary application since this material was instructive in nature to begin with. However, contemporary application of the opening and closing sections of the epistle can produce a greater

challenge due to the specific nature and application to the addressee of the letter. The following is an attempt to provide a contemporary application for 2 John.

- I. Christians enjoy fellowship with one another.
 - A. Christians are united in the truth of Jesus Christ.
 - B. God provides grace, mercy, and peace to his church.

- II. Christians are to continue in obedience and guard their teaching.
 - A. Believers are to continue walking in the commands of God.
 - 1. Walking in the truth is a source of joy.
 - 2. It is important that believers love one another.
 - a. Christians should love one another.
 - b. Love is walking in the commands of the Father, a command which was given from the beginning.
 - B. The local Christian fellowship must guard itself against false teachers and teaching.
 - 1. There are deceivers in this world.
 - a. Their teaching conflicts the basic doctrines of faith.
 - b. A person who teaches against these basic doctrines of faith is a deceiver and is against Christ.
 - 2. Believers must hold fast to teachings of Scripture.
 - a. Christians should beware not to lose the integrity of their teaching.
 - b. Christians should continue in firmly rooted teaching, because those who do, have God, and those who don't continue don't have God.
 - 3. The local church body should take action against false teachers.
 - a. False teachers should not be made welcome in their fellowship.
 - b. Welcoming a false teacher in such a way shares in their evil works.

- III. Christians ought to have fellowship with one another.
 - A. This fellowship should be a source of blessing.
 - B. Christians are related as the family of God.

Exegesis of 2 John

2 John provides a good glimpse at the basic form of the hellenistic letter. Its outline is distinctively organized into the opening (vs. 1-3), the body (4-11) and the closing (12-13).⁶⁴

If verses 4-5 comprises a form of thanksgiving,⁶⁵ then the argument could be made that this is a separate component of the outline.

I. Christians Enjoy Fellowship with
One Another (1-3).

The Praescripto follows the conventional formula of the familiar documentary letter: A-- to B--.⁶⁶ The third ingredient, *χαίρειν*, is absent, yet the only epistle to include this part of the formula is James.⁶⁷ Verse 2 includes a benedictory greeting which is customary in Pauline letters and other Christian letters.⁶⁸ "A" and "B" can be filled in as "ὁ πρεσβύτερος" and "ἐκλεκτῆ κυρία καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις αὐτῆς," respectively and "B" is modified by a rather long relative clause.

⁶⁴Robert W. Funk, "The Form and Structure of II and III John" Journal of Biblical Literature 86 (December 1967): 428.

⁶⁵Schubert, 177.

⁶⁶Exler, 23.

⁶⁷Funk, 424, n. 5.

⁶⁸Ibid., 424.

The identity of both is ambiguous from context alone.

'Εκλεκτῆ κυρία could be perceived as proper names meaning "to the elect Kyria," or "to the lady Electa," or "to Electa Kyria."⁶⁹

Most likely this is a reference to a particular church congregation, yet F. F. Bruce states that the issue is by no means settled, that "so long as either interpretation claims the support of serious students of the document, the question must be treated as an open one."⁷⁰ Ὁ πρεσβύτερος also is an unspecified person.

This is a self-designation which implies the author of the letter is an older man who has acquired a position of leadership and influence in the church.⁷¹ Although the name, John, is not specifically given, the writer is at the very least a member of the Johannine circle which "was responsible for the Gospel and all the letters of John; and he may have be called 'John' for convenience."⁷² He probably holds authority over several churches, and is not the elder of one specific church.⁷³ If Johannine authorship is accepted, the possible reason for not referring to his

⁶⁹Metzger, 721.

⁷⁰F. F. Bruce, The Epistles of John (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), 137.

⁷¹Stephen S. Smalley, 1,2,3 John, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 51, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1984), 317.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Simon J. Kistemaker, Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistle of John, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 373.

apostleship could lie in his familiarity with the church, in which case this would not be needed.⁷⁴ This suggests that there was a bond between the writer and the recipient, one of Christian fellowship.

A. Christians are united in the truth of Jesus (1-2).

⁷⁴Ibid.

The Elder states in verses 1-2 that he loves the chosen lady and her children in truth. The absence of an article before ἀληθεία suggests a deeper significance, the use of "truth" refers to "what is ultimately real; and in the end this means God himself, as he has been revealed in Jesus, and the expression of that reality in the Christian proclamation."⁷⁵ The Elder is not alone in this love, he shares in it with the members of this congregation.⁷⁶ Christians, therefore, are united in love to one another, which is revealed in the truth of Jesus Christ.

B. God provides grace, mercy, and peace to his church (3).

⁷⁵Smalley, 319.

⁷⁶Ibid.

This is a form of benedictory greeting which may serve as a replacement to χαίρειν and as the Salutatio in the Praescript formula.⁷⁷ The greeting is similar to greetings which appear in Ro-

⁷⁷Funk, 424.

mans 1:7, Galatians 6:16, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2, and Jude 2.⁷⁸ This is the only use of ἔλεος in the Johannine writings; εἰρήνη also appears in John 14:27, 16:33, 20:29, 21, 26; and χάρις can be found in John 1:14, 16-17.⁷⁹ While John's greeting does follow a familiar pattern in epistles, in this letter, "we should understand its content in light of the Christian conception of grace, mercy, and peace, supremely manifested in God's work in Jesus Christ."⁸⁰ These are granted to those who are followers and believers in Jesus Christ.

Thus, Christians enjoy fellowship with one another in love and the truth of Jesus. This fellowship is strengthened because of love and because of the truth of Jesus Christ. As a fellowship of believers, all Christians can enjoy in the benefits of knowing Jesus: grace, mercy, and peace, and that further unites Christians in Christ.

II. Christians Are to Continue in Obedience and Guard Their Teaching (4-11).

⁷⁸Marianne Meye Thompson, 1-3 John, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 152.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

This section of the epistle comprises the body of the letter. The exegetical outline, presented in Appendix 3, includes verses 4-6 as part of the body of the letter. Verse 4 conveys the usage of ἐχάρην which was a common reply formula used during

the Greco-Roman period.⁸¹ Exler also cites this as a miscellaneous initial phrase of the body in P. Giss. 21, which was a second century A. D. papyrus.⁸² Schubert also cites this document stating that the use of *λίαν ἐχάρην ἀκούσασα ὅτι* is the functional equivalent of *λίαν εὐχαριστ' ἀκούσασα ὅτι* in the Pauline thanksgivings.⁸³ He concludes that this provides another example of an epistolary thanksgiving in which *εὐχαριστ'* is replaced by *ἐχάρην*.⁸⁴ If this is the case, then verses 4-6 could comprise a thanksgiving and stand as a separate component of the epistle form. However, for this paper, it will be treated as an initial phrase introducing the body of the letter, yet it functions in a very close way to the thanksgiving in that it provides an introduction to the contents of the letter.

A. Believers are to continue walking in the commandments of God (4-6).

The Elder finds joy in that some of the members of the congregation are continuing to walk in truth (vs. 4). He then presents a request to the church that they are to continue to walk in the commands of the Father, which is interrelated to loving one another (vs. 5-6). This appears closely related to 1 John

⁸¹Koskenniemi, 75-77.

⁸²Exler, 112.

⁸³Schubert, 177.

⁸⁴Ibid.

1:7. The use of ἐρωτᾶν is commonly used in the petition formula of the ancient papyri followed by the ἵνα clause.⁸⁵ Funk states that ἐχάρην λίαν "should be understood as the background for this petition."⁸⁶

⁸⁵Terence Y. Mullins, "Petition as a Literary Form," Novum Testamentum 5 (1962): 47.

⁸⁶Funk, 426.

The petition is that the believers love one another and that love will be displayed by their obedience to God's commands. David Jackman states that John could be accused here of arguing in a circle, yet that love and obedience go together and are "inseparable priorities" of walking in the truth and the commandments of God.⁸⁷ To love means to keep the commandments, and walking in the commandments of God is love.

B. The local Christian Fellowship must guard itself against false teachers and teaching (7-11).

This represents the heart of the letter. The threat of false teaching is the occasion. During this time, the apostles and prophets who travelled to churches, teaching in them were well-known figures in church life.⁸⁸ The shift at this point of the letter is from the obedience inside the church, which brings

⁸⁷David Jackman, The Message of John's Letters: Living in the Love of God (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 178-79.

⁸⁸Bruce, 142.

joy, and the threat of false teachers who are deceivers who are out in the world.⁸⁹ The Elder warns the believers not to lose what they had worked for, and then issues a stiff warning that those who do not continue in the teaching of the apostles will not have God (8-9). What had been worked for most likely refers to all that had been accomplished by the work of the apostles and missionaries to start and cultivate the church.⁹⁰

⁸⁹Smalley, 327.

⁹⁰Ibid., 330.

The Elder then warns the people not to welcome or associate with the false teachers, and that doing this is sharing in the evil work of the false teacher (10-11). The congregation is to exclude all deceivers from their fellowship.⁹¹ The Elder is warning the fellowship of believers to avoid problems from the beginning by allowing these deceivers into their fellowship.⁹² For a congregation to willingly and knowingly allow teaching contrary to the gospel within the church is, in reality, participating in the evil works of the false teacher.⁹³

Therefore, Christians are to continue walking in the commandments of God in love to one another. Local congregations

⁹¹Robert Kysar, I,II,III John, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 131.

⁹²Alexander Ross, The Epistles of James and John, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1954), 231-2.

⁹³Bruce, 142.

should guard and preserve their fellowship and their teaching. Those who contradict the doctrines of Jesus Christ and his incarnation, death, burial, and resurrection should be avoided at all costs. A teacher who denies the doctrines of the faith should not be allowed in the fellowship, and especially should be denied opportunity to teach. Christians are to preserve their teachings and live by them.

III. Christians Ought to have fellowship With One Another (12-13).

These verses comprise the closing of the letter. The closing contains the expressed desire to visit the congregation which is a common theme in the Pauline letters designated as the "parousia."⁹⁴ Funk designates the use of the apostolic parousia in verse 12 as the "presbyterial parousia," referring the formula which appears here and in 3 John 13-14.⁹⁵ Verse 13 serves as the closing greeting for the letter.

A. This fellowship should be a source of blessing (12).

The Elder's desire to meet with the congregation face to face suggests that he is eager to visit them in person. Thus the conclusion can be made that the congregation is a source of blessing for him.

B. Christians are related as

⁹⁴Funk, 429.

⁹⁵Ibid.

the family of God (13).

The Elder is sending this letter from a "sister" congregation. This suggests that there is a bond between these churches which is found in Christ. All believers, regardless of their local congregation, make up the body of Christ and are united as heirs of God. The Elder sends final greetings from a congregation which appears to be one of close ties.

The truth of these general statements seem certain: fellowship among believers should be a source of blessing and joy due to the fact that all believers are brothers and sisters in Christ. There is no need for discord and a lack of fellowship among congregations. There should be fellowship in the love and truth of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

From the exegesis of 2 John, one can see that an understanding of the ancient hellenistic epistolary form can provide insights into the methods employed by the writer. The ways in which the writer follows these conventions can aid in the interpretation of the content of the letter. Although the amount of information on the ancient Greek letter is extensive, this should be the starting point for epistolary study. Then, the Pauline formula should be examined in reference to the customs found in

the Christian letter writing tradition. Though most studies continue to be focused upon the Pauline corpus, some studies as to form have begun to appear in the other epistles. The future of epistolary research should provide further study in the Pauline epistle formula and those of other writers.

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