



# BIBLICAL INSIGHTS COMMENTARY



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## One Volume Overview

### INTRODUCTION TO THE NT LETTERS

by

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#### INTRODUCTION

In the two parts studied thus far, we have taken a close look at PAUL THE PERSON and PAUL THE MISSIONARY. Now in Part Three, we will examine PAUL THE WRITER. This means doing an overview study of each of the letters attributed to Paul in the canonical New Testament. This will provide us the data in order to look then at PAUL THE RELIGIOUS THINKER at the end of part three.

Several preliminary questions need an answer before plunging into the text of each of these letters.

**When were these letters written?** The thirteen letters of Paul that are found in the canonical NT represent four distinct periods of writing activity beginning in the late forties just after the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15 and continue to the very end of his life in the mid 60s when he was executed by the Roman emperor Nero. In addition, from references inside these letters we know of at least three other letters, written to the Corinthians and Laodiceans, that did not make it into the canon of sacred Christian scriptures. Of course, this does not include a number of fictitious letters written in the second century and later in the name of Paul which are a part of the New Testament Apocrypha, i.e., [The Epistle to the Laodiceans](#), [Third Epistle to the Corinthians](#), [Epistle of the Corinthians to Paul](#).

These four periods of writing ministry --- early, middle, captivity, pastoral -- correspond to Paul's second and third missionary journeys, along with the periods of being under arrest by the Romans. This underscores something very important about the nature of these writings. They are occasional letters. This scholarly label signals that these letters were not written arbitrary just to write something down. Instead, they are the product of some individual or Christian community undergoing times of crisis and needing Paul's help and advice on how to cope with their situation. The letters are Paul's response to their needs simply because circumstances at the moment prevented him from making a trip to see these individuals and resolving their problems face to face. This he always preferred to do, and occasionally was able to do, but at other times his letter

Timeline of Paul's Ministry

Missionary Activity	Writing Ministry
<b>I. Paul's early ministry</b> A. Conversion and early activities (AD 33-46) B. <i>First missionary journey</i> (AD 46-47), Acts 13:1-14:28  C. Jerusalem council (AD 48), Acts 15:1-35, Gal 2:1-10	Galatians, AD 47 (??) (From Antioch)
<b>II. Paul's middle period of ministry</b> A. <i>The second missionary journey</i> (ca. AD 48-51), Acts 15:36-18:22  B. <i>The third missionary journey</i> (ca AD 52-57), Acts 18:23-21:16	<b>I. Paul's Early Writing Ministry</b> Galatians, AD 49* (From Macedonia) 1 Thessalonians AD 50 (From Athens) 2 Thessalonians AD 50 (From Corinth)  <b>II. Paul's Middle Period Writing Ministry</b> 1 Corinthians, AD 53 (From Ephesus) (Possibly the Prison Letters, ??) 2 Corinthians, AD 56 (From Macedonia) Romans, AD 57 (From Corinth) Galatians, AD 57 (??) (From Corinth)
<b>III. Paul's final period of ministry</b> A. Arrest in Jerusalem (AD 57), Acts 21:17-23:22 B. Imprisonment in Caesarea (AD 57-60), Acts 23:23-26:32	<b>Prison Letters.</b> Colossians, AD 57-60 (From Caesarea) Ephesians (From Caesarea) Philemon (From Caesarea) (Possibly Philippians also)
C. The Voyage to Rome (AD 60), Acts 27:1-28:13  D. House Arrest in Rome (AD 61-62), Acts 28:14-31; Eph. 3:1, 4:1, 6:18-22; Phil. 1:12-26; 2:19-30; 4:1-3, 10-19; Col 4:7-18; Philem 22-24.	Philippians, AD 61-62 (From Rome) (Possibly the above prison letters also)
E. Release from Imprisonment and Resumption of Ministry (AD 63-64), 1 Tim. 1:3-4; Titus 1:5, 3:12-13.	<b>Pastoral Letters.</b> 1 Timothy, AD 63-64 (From Macedonia) Titus, AD 63-64 (From Nicopolis)
F. Subsequent Arrest and Execution in Rome (AD 64), 2 Tim. 1:8, 15-18; 4:7-21.	2 Timothy, AD 64 (From Rome)

was his 'substitute presence' and represented his only option.

As the chart on the right illustrates, he was situated in quite a number of places when the need to compose a letter to some Christian community or individual arose. From seven different locations came thirteen letters over almost two decades of ministry. And his writing activity was but a minor part of what was taking place in Paul's life during this period of time. Ministry,



imprisonment, travel, recovering from beatings -- just to name a few things filled up most every day of his life. All the while the apostle lived in personal poverty and was basically dependent upon the generosity of others for a place to stay and food to eat.

**How were these letters written?** Several aspects form an adequate answer to this question. **First, the form of a Greek ancient personal letter** is important to understand, since Paul's 13 letters build off this form.<sup>1</sup> Four basic sections made up ancient Greek letters: praescriptio; proem; letter body; conclusio. Personal letters written in Greek typically contained all -- or virtually all -- of these elements. Each played an important role in the communication of ideas.

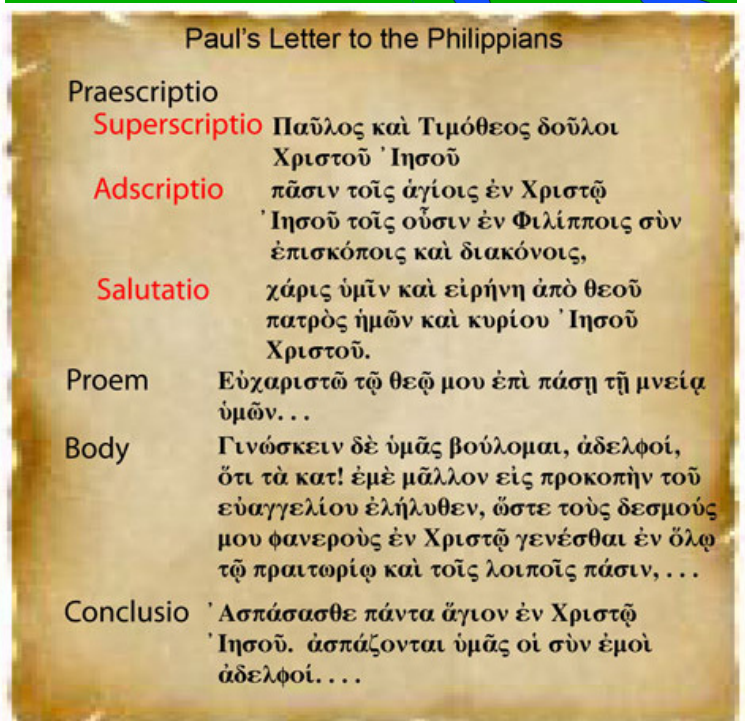
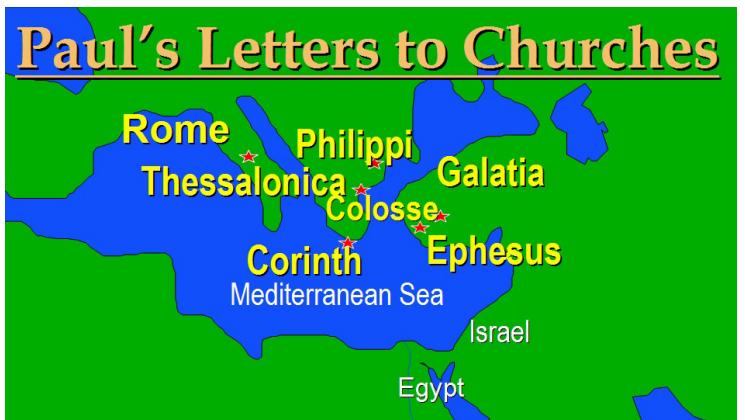
Before looking at each subunit of these letters, we should note initially Paul's use of the Greek letter. One should remember that Paul's letters were composed originally in Koine Greek. With them coming into existence between the late 40s and the mid 60s of the first Christian century, they were written to congregations in the beginning stages of becoming non-Jewish Christian communities. Inside each of these congregations were folks who spoke a variety of different languages, some native to their original homeland; others native to the region where the letter was sent.

But in the eastern Mediterranean world of the first century one language was universally spoken and written: **Koine Greek**. Now what is that? In theory, Koine forms of classical Attic Greek were developed under the supervision of Alexander the Great in the 330s before Christ. In his conquering of the eastern Mediterranean world, one of his primary goals was to introduce Greek culture into the conquered lands. New cities were designed and built according to the Greek grid manner. Greek styled buildings were constructed. The Greek athletic games were introduced. But supporting all of these efforts was the teaching of the Greek language to the people in these conquered lands for both speaking and writing. Since Attic Greek was generally considered to be too difficult for non-Greeks to learn, Alexander employed the talents of

<sup>1</sup>Although distinct letter forms existed for Hebrew letters and also for Aramaic letters, our focus will center on the Greek letter form, since this is the one that Paul used in his letters. The very lengthy set of three articles in the Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary cover all three types in a survey form.

LETTERS. This entry consists of three separate articles surveying epistolography in the biblical world. The first covers the many letters written in Hebrew that have been discovered as a result of archaeological work. The second examines Aramaic letters and letter types. The third examines Greco-Roman letter-writing conventions, providing an important backdrop to our understanding of NT literature.

[David Noel Freedman, ed., "Letters," *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 282.]



Ancient Letter on papyrus his childhood teacher, the philosopher Aristotle, to develop a 'simplified' version of the Greek language that these 'Barbarians' could learn to use.<sup>2</sup> In the end, it

<sup>2</sup>Many today would question just how much simpler Koine

was Koine Greek that became his most lasting legacy to the eastern Mediterranean world. By the beginning of the Christian era, virtually everyone all across the empire especially from Greece eastward spoke and understood Koine Greek.<sup>3</sup>

Given the linguistic situation of Paul's churches in the mid first century, Koine Greek was the only real linguistic option. And then the standard Greek personal letter form was the most appropriate form of communicating with them in writing.<sup>4</sup> By form, however, is meant

Greek is to classical Greek, when for example the approximately 500 separate spellings for each Greek verb was reduced down to around 300 separate spellings!

<sup>3</sup>To be clear, [various dialects](#) of both classical and Koine Greek developed in separate regions. Dominating local native languages had impact on vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. The result was slightly differing versions of Koine Greek. For example the Greek spoken and written in the province of Asia was not the quite same as that spoken in Palestine or even that spoken in Macedonia. Even in Greece Koine Greek was distinctive with stronger influence from the classical Attic dialect. But the commonalities far outweighed the differences, and folks could communicate with one another in the same language even though they lived thousands of miles from one another. Never before in the history of mankind had anything like this ever existed before.

<sup>4</sup>Interestingly, handbooks have survived from this time that give detailed instructions on how to compose different types of letters. Using good letter writing style was important in Paul's world.

#### TYPES OF LETTERS IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

Handbooks from the Greco-Roman world include instructions for writing different types of letters to accomplish different goals:

- Friendship*: to share memories and provide news between friends who are separated
- Prayer*: to express the content of prayers said on the recipient's behalf
- Congratulations*: to applaud the recipient for some accomplishment or honor
- Consolation*: to express sympathy for one who has experienced suffering or loss
- Recommendation*: to testify to someone's abilities and/or character
- Inquiry*: to request information from the recipient
- Response*: to respond to a letter of inquiry by supplying requested information
- Report*: to inform the recipient of news that the sender deems relevant
- Supplication*: to ask the recipient for some sort of favor
- Thanks*: to express gratitude for a favor that has been promised or performed
- Excuse*: to explain why the sender will not be able to do something the recipient requested
- Instruction*: to teach the recipient about some topic
- Advice*: to recommend one course of action over another
- Encouragement*: to urge the recipient to be bold in pursuing some course of action
- Exhortation*: to urge the recipient to avoid immorality and exhibit virtuous behavior
- Accusation*: to claim the recipient has an improper attitude or behavior
- Threat*: to inform the recipient of consequences for be-

havior (especially if it continues)  
*Defense*: to seek to defuse charges made against sender by the recipient or someone else  
*Praise*: to commend the recipient for exemplary behavior

The modern study of ancient Greek letter forms is a relatively new discipline in the larger field of New Testament studies.<sup>5</sup> But it is one that is increasingly recognized as critically important for biblical interpretation. As is always the situation with a newly emerging discipline, different ways of organizing the studies will surface from scholar to scholar, and especially in North

havior (especially if it continues)  
*Defense*: to seek to defuse charges made against sender by the recipient or someone else  
*Praise*: to commend the recipient for exemplary behavior  
[Mark Allan Powell, "Letter," ed. Mark Allan Powell, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (Revised and Updated) (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 550.]

The letters of Paul represent a mixture of several of these objectives. Form classification wise, his letters to the churches represent a personal letter with a formal nature. Those to individuals -- Timothy, Titus, and Philemon -- still maintain this quality since beyond being addressed to individuals they are additionally intended to be read publicly to the congregations connected to the addressed individuals.

<sup>5</sup>One helpful and recent bibliography is:  
"BIBLIOGRAPHY. D. E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (LEC; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987); G. J. Bahr, "The Subscriptions in the Pauline Letters," *JBL* 87 (1968) 27-41; C. J. Bjerkelund, *Parakalô. Form, Funktion und Sinn der parakalô-Sätze in den paulinischen Briefen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967); A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (2d ed.; London: Hodder & Stoughton); W. G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973); R. W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) 250-74; idem, "The Apostolic Parousia: Form and Significance," in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, ed. W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule and R. R. Niebuhr (Cambridge: University Press, 1967) 249-68; G. W. Hansen, *Abraham in Galatians: Epistolary and Rhetorical Contexts* (JSNT 29; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989); R. N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990); T. Y. Mullins, "Formulas in New Testament Epistles," *JBL* 91 (1972) 380-90; idem, "Topos as a New Testament Form," *JBL* 99 (1980) 541-47; P. T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul* (NovTSup 49; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977); E. R. Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (WUNT 2.42; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991); J. T. Sanders, "The Transition from Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving to Body in the Pauline Corpus," *JBL* 81 (1962) 348-62; S. K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (LEC; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); J. L. White, "Introductory Formulae in the Body of the Pauline Letter," *JBL* 90 (1971) 91-97; idem, *Light from Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); idem, *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter* (SBLDS 2; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1972)." [Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 553.]

America as opposed to the United Kingdom and then among scholars on the European continent. The approach that I have developed over the past thirty plus years of study in this field is something of a synthesis of these three regional patterns, but with a dominant focus on the continental European structures, especially those found in Germany. The influence of Professor [Klaus Berger](#) at Heidelberg University in the early 1990s has been substantial after spending time there as a Visiting Scholar in the Protestant Faculty of the university. His work in [Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments](#) is one of the most profound analyses of literary patterns inside the New Testament in existence.<sup>6</sup> Also the work of Professor [William G. Doty](#) in his [Letters in Primitive Christianity](#) first published in 1973 has been very influential as well.<sup>7</sup> Out of those influences, coupled with working as the professor of a PhD year long seminar at SWBTS in the 1980s and 1990s on Critical Methodologies for interpreting the New Testament, has come these insights.

The analysis of form that we will focus on is the basic literary structure with the four basic units of praescriptio; proem; letter body; conclusio. Mostly Latin labels will be used simply because they reflect a more universal labeling system across several different modern western languages. Inside most all of the basic categories are found sub units of materials. These will be both explained and discussed as they surface inside each of Paul's letters, except for the units that are rather common and appear most every time.

### [Praescriptio](#).<sup>8</sup>

One should note that with the writing of the final draft of the letter on a sheet or sheets of papyrus paper, which would be rolled up into a scroll, this segment of the letter was the last to be written because it would be placed on the outside surface of the scroll so as to be visible to the carrier for identification purposes. It wasn't until the much latter switch to the parchment

<sup>6</sup>During my time in Heidelberg in 1990-1991, I was frequently amazed at Prof. Berger's astounding command of almost two dozen different ancient languages. He was always working his way through ancient texts that no one else had looked at and then wanting to discuss his findings with colleagues on the faculty there. I was privileged to be a part of that circle on several occasions.

<sup>7</sup>Other influences have also played a shaping role, especially my participation in the epistolary seminar of the national Society of Biblical Literature in the 1980s. The work of scholars such as Prof. John White who have devoted much of their research to the study of ancient letters is an important source of continual insight. Although now somewhat dated, see my PhD lecture titled "Overview of Epistolary Research" at [cranfordville.com](#). Additionally an extensive bibliography through the 1980s is found at cranfordville as well: [Bibliography: Ancient Letter Writing](#).

<sup>8</sup>For quick referencing of the Greek text of all the Praescriptia in the letters of the New Testament, see my "The Praescriptia of NT Letters: Greek New Testament," at [cranfordville.com](#).

leather writing material that was 'bound' in a codex style format that this unit of the letter was moved to the beginning of each letter since more than one document would be incorporated into the codex 'book' format.<sup>9</sup>

The elements of the Praescriptio were 1) the identification of the sender(s) of the letter called the Superscriptio; 2) the identification of the recipients of the letter called the Adscriptio, and 3) the brief word of greeting from the sender to the recipients called the Salutatio.

Although Paul usually followed the formula type structure for this section that did not use sentence expression, he could and often did use creativity in setting up these three elements.

**Superscriptio.** The first thing in ancient letters was the identification of the source of the letter. The use of the nominative case in ancient Greek with an independent function set for the sender or senders of the letter. In more formal letters this typically included two things: the personal name and the authority title of the sender.

For example, note that the first two words of the Superscriptio in Galatians 1:1 are Παῦλος ἀπόστολος..., [Paul an apostle](#).... In all thirteen letters of Paul, his Greek name Παῦλος is included as the first word of the letter. Only in First and Second Thessalonians is the title part omitted, most likely due to these letters having multiple senders: Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος, [Paul and Silas and Timothy](#).... In nine of the thirteen letters, the title given by Paul is ἀπόστολος, which has the formal meaning of apostle over against the non-formal meaning of missionary. In Phil. 1:1a, due to the double listing of senders, Paul uses a title appropriate to both him and Timothy: Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, [Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus](#). In Romans he uses the double title: Παῦλος δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, κλητὸς ἀπόστολος, [Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, a called apostle](#). In this most formal of all of Paul's letters, the double claiming of divine commissioning was more important since the letter was an introduction of himself to a congregation he had never before visited.

Both of these items gave clear identification of who was sending the letter. In Paul's letters additional items play an important role as well. In seven of the thirteen letters additional individuals are named as senders. Most common is Timothy in six of the seven. But also Silas is named in addition to Timothy in 1-2 Thessalonians, Sosthenes is the additional sender in 1 Corinthians. Most scholars are convinced that at least part of the reason for naming of these extra individuals was due to their having an important role in the composition

<sup>9</sup>Only a very few manuscripts written in the early scroll format survive and most of them in high fragmentary form. But a few with the Praescriptio unit on the 'outside' of the scroll exist, and coupled with extensive writings explaining how all this was done, we have a clear idea of the process.



of the letter, most likely as the writing secretary who did the actual writing itself.

The other item of significance comes in part out of Paul's creative use of the Praescriptio formula. The core elements of name and title will show up in the Superscriptio, for example. But most of the time much more than just the mere listing of these two items will be found. This material I label as Expansion Elements. Normally in the Superscriptio, such elements express an expansion of the title item. A good example is Gal. 1:1-2a

**Παῦλος ἀπόστολος** οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, **καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοὶ**

**Paul an apostle** not from men neither through a man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead **and all the brothers with me.** This letter has two senders: Παῦλος ἀπόστολος,,, καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοί, **Paul an apostle...and all the brothers with me.** But when Paul lists the title ἀπόστολος, he adds several qualifications to this title:

οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων, **not from men**  
οὐδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου, **neither through a man**  
ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, **but through Jesus Christ**  
καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς, **and God the Father**  
τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, **who raised Him from the dead.**

The ingenious thing that Paul is doing here is signaling a basic theme for the letter body of this document. Although this kind of creativity exists in the letters outside those of Paul in the Greek and Latin literature of the time, the apostle makes heavy use of this feature in most all of his letters. These Expansion Items will be found in the different parts of the Praescriptio and also in the Proem of his letters. When therefore this letter was read in the many house church groups throughout the towns and cities of the province of Galatia, the readers / listeners knew from the very outset that one of the issues to be addressed in the letter was going to be a defense of Paul's claim to be an apostle. And in this instance, this defense was being made of a divine origin of apostleship in distinction to some human origin.

What this trait does for us as a modern reader is to give us signals of basic themes of each of Paul's letters in the two initial items of the Praescriptio and the Proem of each letter. Additionally, for you as a modern reader, it further serves to give you a 'quick check' guide for commentaries on each of Paul's letters. First, read [these two items](#) even in a translation text of Paul's letters, and then check the outline of the contents of Paul's letter provided by the commentator. If there is a general matching of themes between these two, then

the commentator most likely understands the contents of the letter. But if they are not a clearly defined match, then don't waste your time using this commentary. The commentator doesn't know how to read Paul's letters, and therefore what he will say about the contents will be pure junk.

**Adscriptio.** The second item in the ID formula was to specify the recipients of the letter. With personal letters to individuals, this centered on a listing of their name using the dative case of the Greek. With letters to groups, this centered on specification of location geographically.

A variety of ways were used by Paul in the specification of recipients in the letters to the churches: τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων, **to the church of the Thessalonians** (1 & 2 Thess); τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ οὔσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ, **to God's church that is in Corinth** (1 & 2 Cor); πᾶσιν τοῖς οὔσιν ἐν Ῥώμῃ, **to all those in Rome** (Rom.); τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ, **to the in Colossae saints and faithful brothers in Christ** (Col.); τοῖς ἀγίοις τοῖς οὔσιν [ἐν Ἐφέσῳ] καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, **to the saints who are [in Ephesus] and faithful ones in Christ Jesus** (Eph.); πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τοῖς οὔσιν ἐν Φιλιππίοις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις, **to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi together with overseers and deacons** (Phil.). These letters are sent to separate Christian communities located in different towns. ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας, **to the churches of Galatia** (Gal. 1). With Galatians, this is the only letter sent specifically to numerous churches located in a Roman province.

Several traits emerge from a comparative study of these Adscriptia.

Although not all are addressed as ἐκκλησία, the majority are. In spite of the English word church being used in translation, a more accurate translation would be 'Christian community.' The English word church carries so much 'baggage' that did not exist in the apostolic era that it is a questionable word for Bible translation. The historical reality of numerous small groups meeting in homes, as Rom. 16 clearly reflects, was the situation for each of these locations. These groups met separately and never came together as a single group.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Several dynamics were in place to drive this pattern.

First, these groups were following the example of the Jewish synagogues which met in private homes in Diaspora Judaism until well into the second century AD. Even after then, Diaspora Judaism was very hesitant to invest the necessary money in building, and maintaining, separate buildings as a religious meeting place. There is a reason why biblical archaeology has uncovered only a small handful of synagogue buildings dated earlier than the third century AD. But numerous private homes going back much earlier that have been uncovered have traces of a functioning synagogue in them. Jewish patrons who opened their homes for the Friday

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evening gathering to pray and study the Torah usually constructed, at their own expense, a separate meeting area in one portion of their home for the group. Both the monetary savings and the likelihood of Roman confiscation of property was minimized by this pattern. Plus indication exists that the patron who provided this gained significant status inside the Jewish community, which he hoped meant extra blessing from God.

One should remember that a high percentage of the various social groups in Greco-Roman society during this time followed very similar patterns. So, a group meeting in a private home was not something strange or unusual. In fact, most all of the Christian leadership terminology for leaders used by Paul in his letters were also used among these non-Christian groups as well. So Jewish and Christian gatherings in private homes blended into society quite naturally. A separate church building with a huge sign in front as is common today would have seemed both strange and dangerous to Christians in the first century.

Second, the questionable status of Christianity among the Pauline churches made meeting in large groups in a central location in the city quite dangerous. When Christianity, under the Pauline mission of the 50s, began taking in non-Jews as church members, the impact was to begin a process of Christianity distancing itself from Judaism. In Palestine, where virtually all Christians were either Jewish or converted Jews until the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD, the status of Christianity was continuously through the 60s as a branch of Judaism. But outside Palestine the situation was dramatically different. Roman law specified that every religious group had to have the direct approval of the Roman senate as a *religio licita*. Without such formal approval by the Senate, the group operated in *religio illicita*, which was considered an act of treason against the Roman empire. To be clear, enforcement of this was spotty and inconsistent. But it meant that Christians outside Palestine met in a shadowy world of legality and were subject to random actions of persecution at any time. Small groups meeting in private homes attracted far less attention than large, public gatherings.

Third, theologically Paul's emphasis upon 'church' often revolved around the family image, and meeting in private homes re-enforced that image of church as spiritual family. Out of these small groups came direct ministry to one another, as well as close familiarity with everyone in the group. Given the developing diversity of these groups, ethnically, socially etc., this sense of closeness was vital for the spiritual group to thrive. Developing proper unity inside the group was a frequent topic addressed by Paul in his letters.

Fourth, the minimal leadership structures, as defined both by Paul and by Luke in Acts could function far more effectively when working with a group of one to three dozen people. In Paul's letters, a twofold local group leadership structure was basic: ἐπίσκοποι καὶ διάκονοι. For Luke in Acts, a singular leadership structure is noted, that of πρεσβύτεροι. When one analyzes closely group organizational patterns in the various social and religious groups generally across society in the first century, the clear picture emerges that everything functioned with very limited and simple leadership roles. Both Judaism and Christianity adhered to that social pattern as well.

These leaders did meet usually on a regular basis with one another and a leader of the leaders would emerge, e.g., James in Jerusalem as per Acts 15. They could deal with issues that arose, provide needed leadership training etc., all for giving proper direction to the larger Christian community in the city through the various house church groups. .

Crucial to each of the references to churches is the geographical segment. All but one name cities and the one, Galatians, that is addressed to churches rather than a church names a Roman province. These named cities represent places where Paul did extensive missionary work, except for Rome.

At the time of the writing of this letter to the Romans in the middle 50s from Corinth, Paul had not yet traveled to Rome. As chapter fifteen makes clear, this letter was a letter of introduction that was designed to inform the church of Paul's beliefs and preaching in order to enlist their support in an anticipated ministry west of Rome all the way to Spain. This accounts for the distinctive structure, writing style etc. of Romans that sets it apart from his other letters. It is also what has made this document the most read and studied of all of Paul's writings down through the centuries.

One other interesting aspect from these [Adscriptia](#) emerges. The way that Paul customizes each reflects tones and anticipated approaches to the contents of the letter body. Just one example here. The shortest, and most curt, of all of them is ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας, to the churches of Galatia, in Gal. 1:2. As the discussion below will document, Paul was not happy with these congregations when this letter was composed. Through the letter, a stern rebuke of them is frequent. Thus this very short bland Adscriptio signals this attitude from the outset of the letter.

Occasionally significant expansion elements are inserted as a part of the Adscriptio. A primary example of this is in 1 Cor. 1:2

*τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῆ οὔσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ, ἡγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, κλητοῖς ἁγίοις, σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν παντί τόπῳ, αὐτῶν καὶ ἡμῶν.*

*To God's church that is in Corinth, those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy, together with all those calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, both their Lord and ours.*

Here is a congregation having all kinds of problems with living a holy life as Christians. In anticipation of addressing many of those deviations in the letter body, Paul affirms the ideals of the Christian experience and the spiritual status before God of truly committed believers. The shift from the singular τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ to the plural ἡγιασμένοις has the effect of defining the particularly targeted members of the church. He especially highlights the lordship of Christ at the end, which will be the bottom line solution to these deviations from holiness plaguing the Corinthian church.

A somewhat similar structure pattern prevails in the four letters of Paul addressed to individuals: Philemon, First and Second Timothy, and Titus.

**Philm. 1-2a.** Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν 2 καὶ Ἀπφία τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιῶτῃ ἡμῶν καὶ τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησίᾳ,

To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, 2 to Ap-  
phia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to  
the church in your house

**1 Tim. 1:2a.** Τιμοθέῳ γνησίῳ τέκνῳ ἐν πίστει,  
To Timothy true child in faith

**2 Tim. 1:2a.** Τιμοθέῳ ἀγαπητῷ τέκνῳ,  
To Timothy beloved child,

**Titus 1:4a** Τίτῳ γνησίῳ τέκνῳ κατὰ κοινὴν πίστιν,  
To Titus genuine child in a common faith,

First, the letter to Philemon -- as traditionally labeled -- is actually a letter to several individuals, although the letter body centers only on Philemon, his runaway slave, and Paul. It's very clear that this was not intended as a private letter to Philemon, as the inclusion of the house church group in the Adscriptio makes clear. How Philemon handled this situation would have implications for the entire Christian community at Colossae, and Paul wanted this letter made open to the entire Christian community.

Terms of endearment from Paul to the individuals in all four of these letters play an important role in communicating Paul's concerns and compassion in writing the letters. With Timothy and Titus, the special term τέκνῳ, *child*, underscore a special spiritual relationship of the apostle to these two men. The sense of genuineness or loyalty added as a modifier stresses not loyalty to Paul but to Christ in shared commitment to Him as κατὰ κοινὴν πίστιν in Tit. 1:4 makes clear. In the Adscriptio, the endearing terms are appropriate to Paul's spiritual relationship with them: τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν, *our beloved one and fellow worker*; τῇ ἀδελφῇ, *our brother*; τῷ συστρατιῶτῃ ἡμῶν, *our fellow soldier*. Notice the plural ἡμῶν, *our*, that reaches back to both Paul and Timothy as senders of this letter.

**Salutatio.** This greeting comes after the listing of both sender and receiver of the letter, and stands as a friendly expression from the sender to the receiver. The general intent was to establish a friendly tone for the letter. This was especially important if stern demands and/or rebukes were to be given in the letter body.

The interesting aspect of this part of Paul's expression is how he deviates from the standard greeting found in the vast majority of the Greek letters of this period. Normally the greeting was a single word, χαίρειν, in the letters because this was the typical oral greeting to friends in public settings. Such a Salutatio is found inside the NT only in James 1:1c; Acts 15:23 (James' letter to Antioch); Acts 23:26 (letter to Felix). In 2 John 10-11 one finds an example of χαίρειν as a verbal greeting.

The infinitive χαίρειν comes from the verb χαίρω

which is based on the root stem χαρ-. From that same stem comes also χάρις, the noun meaning grace in English. Paul in a highly creative manner then develops his standard letter greeting of χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη, *grace to you and peace*. The χάρις part reflects the traditional Greek greeting but with a distinctive Christian twist. The εἰρήνη part comes out of the traditional Hebrew greeting both oral and written as דילשׁ, *shālôm*, meaning peace. The very core Salutatio in Paul is χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη but as 1 Cor. 1:3 reflects, the sources of these qualities are often added by Paul as ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ*. The specification of sources can vary in wording but uniformly references both God and Christ. Only in First and Second Timothy is the third trait added to the grace and peace formula: χάρις ἔλεος εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς καὶ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν, *grace, mercy, peace from God the Father and our Lord Christ Jesus*. With this formula, Paul develops a uniquely Christian greeting in his letters. With the bonding objective between sender and readers for letters, this greeting underscores the grace and peace of God through Christ as the source of connection.

Additionally in a few instances, Expansion Elements will be added to the Salutatio that serve an amplification role as well as signal anticipated themes in the letter body. Galatians 1:3-5 is one of the longest illustrations of this pattern:

3 **χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη** ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 4 τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέλθῃ ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστώτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, 5 ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων, ἀμήν.

3 **Grace to you and peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

With a defense of both Paul's apostleship and his preaching of the Gospel as the central themes of the letter, this expanded Salutatio provides his readers in advance a summary definition of his Gospel by expanding the connection between God and Christ. He concludes with a doxological praise statement in v. 5. This expansion comes very close to being a Pauline equivalent of John 3:16. It matches in shorter form the longer Superscriptio expansion in Rom. 1:1b-6 defining εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ (v. 1b).

**The communication purpose of the Praescriptio**, in addition to the ID function it had, was to establish a friendly bond between the sender and his readers. This would especially be the case if the letter body con-

tained criticism of the recipients in some way or another.

What is usually not true in most modern western cultures was critically true in first century Greco-Roman and Jewish societies.<sup>11</sup> Being acknowledged as a friend played a central role to establishing social networks of connections in business, in social activities, in life generally.<sup>12</sup> A label that was worn proudly was illustrated by James in 3:23 φίλος θεοῦ ἐκλήθη, *he was called God's friend*. To be acknowledged as a friend of deity was the highest esteem, but great respect came when one's formal friends were in the ranks of the powerful and the wealthy. Rising in society from one level to a higher level (στάσις) depended largely upon making friends in higher ranks than yours. This was particularly true for artisans and craft workers who depended upon patronage from people of means in order to earn a living.

The letter as a major means of nonverbal communication underscored this social dynamic of friendship in several ways. And one of the more important ways was at the point of the greeting in the Praescriptio section, along with the ἀσπασμοί, Greetings expressions in the Conclusio unit at the end of the letter.<sup>13</sup> The sender of

<sup>11</sup>“Friendship was a regular ancient topic of discourse (e.g., Epictetus Disc. 2.22), the leading subject of numerous essays, for instance, by Aristotle (Eth. Eud. 7.1234b-1246a; Eth. Nic. 8–9); Plutarch (Many Friends, Mor. 93A-97B); Dio Chrysostom (Third Discourse on Kingship 99–100); Cicero (De Amic.); Seneca (Ep. Lucil. 3, “On True and False Friendships”; 9, “On Philosophy and Friendship”; see further Sevenster, 172–77); and Theophrastus (according to Aulus Gellius Noc. Att. 1.3.10–11). Scholars have produced detailed studies of friendship in Philo, who develops some Stoic ideals (see Sterling); on Aristotle (Schroeder, 35–45) and his followers, the Peripatetics (Schroeder, 45–56; for other sources, see especially Fitzgerald 1997b, 7–10). Even before Aristotle, many ideals of friendship circulated that later became pervasive in the Roman world (see Fitzgerald 1997a).

“There were a variety of perspectives on and kinds of friendship, not only in the philosophers but also throughout Greco-Roman and Jewish society. Friendship could signify a relationship of dependence or of equality, of impersonal alliances or of personal bonds of affection.”

[C. S. Keener, “Friendship,” ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, *Dictionary of New Testament Background: a Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 380–381.]

<sup>12</sup>The basic terms are *ḥav*, *sodh*, *rea*; ἑταῖρος *hetairos*; φίλος *philos*. [William Klassen, “Friend, Friendship,” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 490.]

<sup>13</sup>**33.20 ἀσπάζομαι; ἀσπασμός, οὗ m:** to employ certain set phrases as a part of the process of greeting, whether communicated directly or indirectly—‘to greet, to send greetings.’

**ἀσπάζομαι:** προστρέχοντες ἠσπάζοντο αὐτόν ‘they ran to him and greeted him’ Mk 9:15; ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς οἱ ἀδελφοὶ πάντες ‘all the Christian brothers (here) send greetings to you’ 1 Cor 16:20. It is possible that in some contexts ἀσπάζομαι could be interpreted as ‘to visit,’ so that in Ac 18:22 one may render ἀσπασάμενος τὴν ἐκκλησίαν as ‘visiting the church’ rather than as

the letter always sought to begin his correspondence to the recipient on a positive note of friendly expression. The Salutatio was a key means of doing this.

### Proem.

This introductory prayer was not mandated as much as at least some elements of the Praescriptio. In Paul, either it or a substitute form (Gal. 1:6-10) is found in all thirteen of [Paul's letters](#) except for Titus. Outside the letters of the NT, this prayer normally took the form of a health wish via a prayer to the patron deity of the letter recipient. The Proem expression in Third John (vv. 2-4) comes the closest to the typical form found outside the NT:

**2 Ἀγαπητέ, περὶ πάντων εὐχομαί σε εὐοδοῦσθαι καὶ ὑγιαίνειν,** καθὼς εὐοδοῦταί σου ἡ ψυχὴ. 3 ἐχάρην γὰρ λίαν ἐρχομένων ἀδελφῶν καὶ μαρτυρούντων σου τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, καθὼς σὺ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ περιπατεῖς. 4 μειζότεραν τούτων οὐκ ἔχω χαρὰν, ἵνα ἀκούω τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα ἐν ἀληθείᾳ περιπατοῦντα.

**2 Beloved, above all things I pray that you may be prospered and enjoy good health to the degree that** ‘greeting the church.’

**ἀσπασμός:** τῶν θελότων ἐν στολαῖς περιπατεῖν καὶ ἀσπασμοὺς ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς ‘who like to walk around in long robes and be greeted in the marketplace’ Mk 12:38.

**33.21 ἀσπασάζομαι:** to say goodbye—‘to bid goodbye to, to take leave of.’ ἀπῆσπασάμεθα ἀλλήλους, καὶ ἀνέβημεν εἰς τὸ πλοῖον ‘we bid goodbye to one another and went aboard the ship’ Ac 21:6; ἀσπασάμενος ἐξῆλθεν πορεύεσθαι εἰς Μακεδονίαν ‘he said goodbye, then left and went on to Macedonia’ Ac 20:1.

**33.22 χαίρω<sup>b</sup>:** to employ a formalized expression of greeting, implying a wish for happiness on the part of the person greeted—‘hail, greetings.’ ἤρξαντο ἀσπάζεσθαι αὐτόν, Χαῖρε, βασιλεῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ‘they began to greet him, Hail, King of the Jews’ Mk 15:18. The functional equivalent of χαίρω<sup>b</sup> in Spanish would be *que viva*. In traditional English one might employ an expression such as ‘long live!’

**33.23 ἀποτάσσομαι:** to employ formalized expressions appropriate to leaving or saying farewell to someone, possibly involving the communication of final arrangements for leaving—‘to say goodbye.’ πρῶτον δὲ ἐπίτρεψόν μοι ἀποτάξασθαι τοῖς εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου ‘first let me go and say goodbye to my family’ Lk 9:61.

**33.24 ῥώννυμαι<sup>b</sup>:** to end a letter by means of the expression ἔρωσθε (ἔρῳσσω in some manuscripts), always having a favorable connotation—‘goodbye.’ ἐξ ὧν διατηροῦντες ἑαυτοὺς εὖ πράξετε. Ἐρωσθε ‘you will do well if you keep yourselves from doing these things. Goodbye’ Ac 15:29. Since in Ac 15:29 ἔρωσθε ends a letter, it may be necessary in some languages to employ a typical letter-ending formula which will at the same time be favorable, for example, ‘with best wishes’ or ‘with sincere greetings.’ It would be quite wrong to use literally an expression such as ‘goodbye’ if this would be employed only or principally in direct address rather than at the end of a letter. For another interpretation of ἔρωσθε in Ac 15:29, see 23.133.

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 391.]



your soul is prospering.<sup>14</sup> 3 For I was made very happy by the coming of brothers and your witnessing to the truth, even as you live in Truth. Greater joy than this I do not have than that I hear that my children are living in Truth.

Prosperity and/or good health were common wishes expressed in the majority of Proem expressions in personal letters in Greek and Latin during this era. The universal belief was that such depended upon the individual having a favorable status before his or her patron god or gods.

Here is where the Pauline creativity with the contemporary letter form reaches its highest point. In the majority of Paul's letters, the apostle used a few stock expressions to introduce the Proem:

**Εὐχαριστοῦμεν / εὐχαριστῶ τῷ (θεῷ), we / I give thanks to God...**

1-2 Thess; 1 Cor; Rom; Philm; Col; Phil;

**Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεός..., blessed is the God...**

2 Cor; Eph;

**Χάριν ἔχω τῷ..., I have praise to...**

1-2 Tim.

Only two of Paul's letters are missing a Proem: Titus and Galatians. No particular reason for leaving it out in Titus emerges in the text. But in Galatians the Proem is substituted with an Exordium due to the very angry posture behind the composition of the letter.

Θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι [Χριστοῦ] εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον,

I am astonished that so quickly in this manner you are turning from the One who called you in the grace of Christ into another gospel.... (1:6-10).

More will be said below about this substitute form which was appropriate in the rhetorical patterns of ancient Greek for the kind of letter that Galatians mimicked.

The Proema in Paul's letters always begin with a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his designated recipients. All of the above listed beginning expressions point to gratitude to God from Paul concerning those the letter was written to. Important here also will be the Expansion Elements added to the core expression. The apostle high lights strong points about his initial readers. These then quite often will be amplified in the letter body so that the readers have a more detailed understanding of Paul's gratitude for them.

In most of Paul's proema directed to the churches, the prayer of thanksgiving transitions into an intercessory prayer for his readers that high lights perceived spiritual needs in the congregations. The Expansion

<sup>14</sup>John's very different prayer here wishes that the outward circumstance and health of his reader match his spiritual health. If God granted such a wish regarding your life, how would it impact the non-religious side of your life? For good? Or for bad? A very intriguing question worth pondering!

Elements here, that stated their needs as Paul's prayer points to, then would signal topics to also be addressed in the letter body. Sometimes these Expansion Elements can be quite lengthy as illustrated in 1 Thess 1:2 (core) with 1:3-10 forming the Expansion Elements. In the three especially personal letters directed to Timothy and Titus, a very different writing situation exists. Although all three letters are intended for public reading in the churches, the content is directed as these two associates. This most likely accounts for the absence of a Proem in Titus. And careful analysis of the Proema in First and Second Timothy (1:12-17; 1:3-5) reveals a distinctly different thrust by Paul than is typical in the letters to the churches. The apostle always 'customized' his prayers to fit the occasion and needs.

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Hopefully by this point, you have begun to sense how important these two introductory units -- the Praescriptio and Proem -- are to the Pauline letters. Learning how to read these letters properly can throw enormous light onto the meaning and thrust of the main part of the letter, the body proper. These establish a framework within which to understand the letter body, and this can function as a helpful check on interpretive conclusions reached about the contents in the letter body.

A few other introductory aspects primarily related to these two letter units need to be addressed as well. These have to do mostly with the traditional New Testament Introduction issues that have been prominent in the modern era of biblical studies since the developing of Introduction as a distinct discipline in biblical studies in the middle 1800s.<sup>15</sup> Beyond what is automat-

<sup>15</sup>One of the best summations of the background and emergence of the discipline of "Introduction to the NT" studies is found in Werner Georg Kümmel, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1980) as section 3 on pages 5-6. The essence of this discipline is described by Kümmel as "Die wissenschaftliche Disciplin der „Einleitung in das NT“ behandelt die geschichtlichen Fragen der entstehung der nt."

Out of this discipline has emerged, especially in western hemisphere studies, a huge range of introductions to the NT as published textbooks widely used in university and seminary/divine school beginning courses. These courses are also usually labeled either as "Introduction to the New Testament" or "Survey of the New Testament." These two categories of titles mark distinct approaches to the study of the NT, usually at the point of how much direct attention is given to the text of the NT in the course. At the university level, such courses are normally one semester courses, but at the master's level in seminaries / divinity schools they are normally two semester courses. Literally thousands of textbook publications exist as potential required texts for such courses being taught today. Many NT scholars have built their entire career around the publication of such a textbook. This is true in North America both for church related schools and for the public universities. In the US public colleges and universities, the slant is an introduction to the

ically covered especially in the Praescriptio of the letters, -- who?; to whom? why? -- some attention also needs to be given to Where was Paul at the time of composition? and to When was the letter composed? These 'background' issues that are found in most every commentary and NT introduction are essentially the so-called 'reporter questions' that have emerged in the modern era of journalism. The issues raised by these questions became a part of modern biblical studies beginning in the late 1700s and have remained important through today. In the format of this study, these additional questions will be inserted into the discussion of the Praescriptio sub units of Superscriptio and Adscriptio, where they logically fit.

### Letter Body.

Here is where the greatest opportunity for creativity existed generally for the ancient letter writer. But in the secular pattern this was not completely open ended. The various handbooks of that time provided rather detailed guidelines to be followed depending upon the intended purpose of the letter. Plus, rather involved guidelines were provided for the best way of arguing one's point in the letter body were given. These generally were applications of similar guidelines for making public speeches, but with some modifications for a written communication. They are subdivisions of [ancient rhetoric](#).<sup>16</sup>

When one examines how Paul put his ideas together in the letter body of his writings, a wide array of approaches becomes apparent. He makes use of literary forms out of classical Greek rhetoric and also of the scribal Judaism of his day. His patterns of arguing a point tend to reflect his scribal Jewish training as a Pharisee more than dependence upon patterns of persuasion in Greek rhetoric. But he can, and on occasion does, make use of such Greek forms. Here his dual educational background both at Tarsus and Jerusalem are brought to bear upon his presentation of the Gospel and how it should impact the daily lives of believers. This dual heritage gave him a distinct advantage over Peter, John and other early leaders with only the Jewish heritage.<sup>17</sup> He was a Diaspora Jew indeed with the

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NT as literature, rather than reflecting a sectarian slant to the NT as sacred writings. The latter grouping covers the entire range of theological belief about scripture and the Christian religion.

<sup>16</sup>For an inclusive survey of the general topic of rhetoric, ancient to modern, see "Rhetoric," [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org).

<sup>17</sup>The Galilean background of many of the Twelve helped broaden the perspective of these early leaders. Galilee exposed them much more directly to the Hellenism of the non-Jewish world, than growing up in Judea would have. In the other letters of several of these apostles, this educational limitation is overcome in large part through the use of writing secretaries with much broader and more inclusive educational backgrounds, e.g., Silas (1 Pet. 5). Virtually all of those who have been identified as potential secre-

benefits of both worlds!

**Over arching structures.** One thing that should be remembered is that there is no standard Pauline approach to filling out the body of his letters. Sometimes Romans is presented as though it were the Pauline standard, with doctrine first followed by application (chapters 1 - 11 then chapters 12-15).<sup>18</sup> No only is such a pattern not found hardly ever, I'm increasingly convinced that it does not exist at all except in the misguided minds of some commentators. This highly artificial division of thought reflects post Enlightenment theme division and is contradicted by the biblical language used by the apostle as well as by other NT writers. The verb διδάσκω (97x) conveys the idea to teach usually with a focus upon teaching the Gospel.<sup>19</sup> Some nouns are built off the same root stem of the verb that can stress either what is taught, the action of teaching, or the one doing the teaching: διδασκαλία (21x), διδαχή (30x), διδάσκαλος (50x). The first two nouns both carry the sense of what is taught or the action of teaching.

When both διδασκαλία (6 of 21x) and διδαχή (0 of 30x) are translated in the NRSV as 'doctrine', the English word carries a substantial amount of 'baggage' that is not present in the first century Greek word. Primarily doctrine in the modern sense implies some kind of organized system of religious teaching built around a central theme. One looks in vain for such a critter inside the New Testament. All but one of these six translations of διδασκαλία as 'doctrine' are found inside Paul's writings: Eph. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:3; Tit. 1:9; 2:1, 10. In the Timothy and Titus passages the phrase is τῆς ὑγιαίνουσας διδασκαλίας, [sound doctrine](#). Even this translation is misleading. The participle adjective ὑγιαίνουσας comes from the verb ὑγιαίνω meaning to promote good physical health, or to be healthy. The translation 'sound doctrine' in English implies the doctrine is healthy, but the Greek phrase ὑγιαίνουσας διδασκαλίας more naturally and correctly means teaching that produces spiritual

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taries for the different NT authors were Hellenistic Diaspora Jews rather than Hebraist Jews.

But it was nothing like growing up in the Diaspora completely surrounded by Hellenism and wrestling with how to maintain one's Jewishness in such an atmosphere. This was Paul's experience until being sent to Jerusalem as an older teenager for advanced training in Judaism from [Gamaliel](#).

<sup>18</sup>The wording for this varies: doctrine ==> application; teaching ==> practical etc.

<sup>19</sup>But this is only one part of the broader picture. In the Greek lexicon, Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996) topics 33.224 to 33:250 are devoted to the full range of Greek words in the NT with the central point on teach / teaching / teacher. Some thirty plus separate words convey these ideas. And this does not utilize nearly all the related words available in the Greek language of the first century. .



health, as 'health promoting teaching.' Apostolic Christianity measured the 'correctness' of any teaching by the product it produced, not by whether it matched some abstract system of belief. A careful analysis of the above six passages reveals that Paul's problem with the false teachers was that their teaching produced understandings of the Gospel that led people into sinful behavior. The εὐαγγέλιον that he and the other apostles promoted was not a well organized system of belief, but rather teaching about who Christ was and how His actions in crucifixion and resurrection provided the path to authentic relationship to God.<sup>20</sup> See Rom. 1:1c-6 for one of several concise summations by Paul.

Thus when trying to understand the basic flow of thought in the letter body of Paul's writings, artificial divisions such as doctrine / practical are completely incorrect and misleading. One will never grasp Paul's thinking coming at it like this.

Plus, one must remember the occasional nature of all of Paul's letters. The apostle always responds to perceived needs on the part of his reader(s). And he very creatively arranges his response to meet those needs. No set 'road map' existed in his thinking.

In Romans, chapters one through fifteen are largely built around τὸ εὐαγγέλιον as the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται as set forth in 1:16-17. He proceeds then to address different aspects of the Gospel being the revelation of God's righteousness by touching on a variety of implications of this all the way from the depravity of the pagan world to the impact of this Gospel on the daily living of Christians in relationship with one another. Contrary to most commentator's artificial outlining of the letter body, there is no Hegelian like progression of thought from one emphasis to another. How this impacts Israel in chapters nine through

<sup>20</sup>One very interesting implication from this more biblical perspective is to nullify the often heard statement in today's world, that one can be completely orthodox in belief but spiritually dead. In Paul's mind, if one was exposed to and lived by ὑγιαίνουσας διδασκαλίας his spiritual life would be vital and healthy. Paul's measurement went the reverse direction. If one's life was not spiritually healthy, then he was not being influenced by the Gospel of Christ. Instead, the influence was some kind of false teaching, as the verb ἐτεροδιδασκαλέω defines, because the authentic Gospel being taught produces only spiritual healthiness. As Eph. 4:14 illustrates, the apostolic emphasis is not so much on the content of false teaching as it is on those who teach it and the spiritual havoc it produces in the Christian communities.

Ever wonder why theologians have difficulty defining false doctrine from inside the NT? Overwhelmingly later paradigms from the church fathers down to our present time are pushed on to the text of the NT in order to explain 'false doctrine' in the NT. This kind of artificiality results from using 'doctrine' to translate διδασκαλία and wrongly understanding the role of the participle adjective ὑγιαίνουσας. Not once in the NT is the 'content' of false doctrine ever laid out in any detail. Instead, false teaching is always linked to misbehavior, and the above makes it clear why this is so. .

eleven is no 'appendix' but rather an integral part of the Gospel when being affirmed to a new readership with a Jewish segment having questions about how their new faith connected to their Jewish religious heritage. In the pagan world of first century Rome, the difference that Gospel commitment to Christ would make in one's relationships in daily living was of critical importance.<sup>21</sup>

The closest Paul ever comes to some kind of structural design for the letter body is First Corinthians. In this letter, he was responding to two sources of reports and sets of questions presented to him by the household of Chloe (τῶν Χλόης, 1:11) and a group sent to Ephesus by the Corinthian church with a set of written questions (Περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε, 7:1). The variety of themes in the first six chapters come out of the report from the people of Chloe, while the content of chapters seven through sixteen are Paul's responses to the various questions. Note that in this second section especially the apostle uses the standard Περὶ δὲ τῶν... introductory prepositional phrase to introduce new sections.

As we work our way through each of the Pauline letters, we will note the distinctive way that he puts his ideas together for each letter.

**Building Blocks for Idea Presentation.** Much of the content of the letter body section of Paul's writings does not represent patterned kinds of expression. It's just standard prose type of writing either didactic or narrative in content.

Modern studies with a literary form focus have concentrated on identifying legitimate literary genre forms along with standard discourse markers. It is clear that the apostle did reach out to utilize certain existing literary forms as sources for a fair amount of the content in this part of his letters. Sometimes these literary forms had their roots in the OT, but he also reached out to emerging Christian forms largely developed through oral transmission of the Gospel in the first three or so decades after Jesus' ascension to heaven. In some instances, e.g., [vice and virtue lists](#), established forms in the non-Christian literary world were utilized with appropriate Christian modification.

In the ancient world, most people preferred orally handed down tradition to written expressions of it. The synoptic gospels reflect this preference with substantial incorporation of orally developed patterns of the teachings and stories about Jesus. The time period of Christian history covered by Luke's *Acts of the Apostles*, about 30 to 62 AD is the fertile era for the devel-

<sup>21</sup>It is very encouraging to me to observe that recent commentators over the last few decades are moving away from the older misleading structuralizing of Romans around theology rather than Christian ministry to the church at Rome. In its original setting, Romans is a missionary document through and through, not an ivory tower theological treatise.

opment of Christian tradition into easily memorizable oral forms. This made the instructing of new converts much easier, as well as provided increasing amounts of the traditions about Jesus for the increasing numbers of non-Jewish Christians outside of Palestine. As long as the twelve apostles were living, validation of this material was simple. But with the passing of time, and the death of some of the apostles, the need to convert this material into structured written and validated form grew. Thus the writing of the 27 documents of the NT takes place mostly from the late 40s to the middle 70s of the first century. Only the Johannine materials come afterwards toward the end of the first century.

When Paul did his writing of letters -- late 40s to middle 60s -- a lot of Christian teaching existed in fixed oral form and he would frequently incorporate elements of this into his letters when appropriate to his theme.

In my web page [NEW TESTAMENT GENRE](#) the identifiable literary forms in the letter body section are identified and discussed. Additionally the subunits OPENING FORMULAE and CLOSING list the more important discourse markers that signal the beginning and the closing of the letter body. Additionally the OPENING FORMULAE are also used to signal shifts from one topic to another inside the letter body. As we survey this section of each of the Pauline letters, we will highlight those literary forms that are used by Paul in each of his letters. His creativity really shines in the masterful way that all of these elements come together in this section of each of his letters.

**Conclusio.** This section is always included in Paul's letters, The [content](#) could range from a simple 'H χάρις μεθ' ὑμῶν, [Grace be with you](#), in 1 Tim. 6:21b to a very lengthy expression like Rom. 16:1-27. The content could vary in form and expression more here than in the other sections. But four identifiable sub forms were well established and are found in most of Paul's letter Conclusia: greetings; sender verification; doxology; benedictio.<sup>22</sup>

Although this section of Paul's letters is most likely the least studied part of his letters, it is rich in profound insight both historically and spiritually. And it deserves to be examined much more closely than it usually is.

The objective of the Conclusio returns to the objective of the Praescriptio, and especially the Salutatio, with a desire to close out the letter on friendly terms with the intended recipient(s) of the letter. In particular the including of greetings reflects the tremendous importance on maintaining proper friendships with others that were so much a part of the first century world. Only older traditional European culture reflects something

<sup>22</sup>In the [Conclusio](#) link for NEW TESTAMENT GENRE at cranfordville are links to each of these four forms containing the English texts of each type where found in the letters of Paul.

similar in the modern world.

The prayer of benediction, the Benedictio, at the very end reached back to the Proem of the letter at the beginning, and thus surrounded the letter with prayers to God at the beginning and the ending of the letter. In addition with the clear intention of Paul that each of his letters be read publicly in the house church groups of the city or region to which they were sent, his letter mimicked the early pattern of Christian gatherings which began and ended with a formal prayer to God. This was one of the legacies that endured from the synagogue model of Jewish assembly on Friday evenings when Christianity was completely Jewish during the first couple of decades.

The [Sender Verification](#) was for the purpose of validating that this letter had indeed come from the apostle Paul. In reality, Paul did not write any of his letters. The actual composition was done by a writing secretary. In some part of the Conclusio, Paul would finish the hand writing of the composition himself. Since the recipients of the letter were familiar with his hand writing, they would recognize that the contents of the letter were Paul's even though he had not actually written them and they reflected someone else's handwriting.

Thus the Conclusio would bring the letter full circle back to the designated recipients in the Adscriptio. In closing out the letter, he attempted to reaffirm a bond of friendship between Paul and his initial readers. Often personal statements made about the apostle's situation at the time of the writing gave the readers points of prayer concern for Paul so that they could pray for him with greater understanding of his needs.

It is good therefore to always pay close attention to this final section of each of Paul's letters.

**Second, the method of writing these letters** was complex.

We live in a world today in which the composing of a letter is a relatively easy process. Most of it is done with a computer or some kind of smart device electronically. I have come to appreciate the Spanish phrase for email, *correo electrónico*. It reminds me of the ease and simplicity of corresponding with other people literally all over the world almost instantaneously. To be sure, I'm not into the deviate forms of English slang -- said intentionally -- that go along with text messaging on a smart device. Although done for convenience, this seems to be carrying language back to a primitive grunt stage of limited communication at an enormously ambiguous level. American English already struggles with this problem, and causes me to revert to German, Spanish, or French whenever possible to get around the communications barriers.

Non verbal communication in the world of Paul was both enormously more important than in our world and also enormously more complex to produce than in our world.<sup>23</sup> To be clear, his world much, much preferred direct verbal communication with one another. But in times where communication was necessary and direct verbal communication was not possible, the ancient letter, above all other written forms, was the primary vehicle of communicating.<sup>24</sup> The letter was used in a wide range of communications ranging from formal to informal personal expressions.<sup>25</sup> This is one of the reasons

<sup>23</sup>For a more detailed discussion of letter composition in Paul's world see my [MAKING SENSE OF THE BIBLE](#) page at cranfordville. The following topics in [Session One](#) are most relevant:

## 1.2 Ancient world of writing

### 1.2.1 World of the Hebrew scriptures

#### 1.2.1.1 Writing materials

#### 1.2.1.2 Writing methods

#### 1.2.1.3 Motivation for Writing

### 1.2.2 World of Christian scriptures

#### 1.2.2.1 Writing materials

#### 1.2.2.2 Writing methods

#### 1.2.2.3 Motivation for Writing

<sup>24</sup>“The letter is one of the most common and socially significant kinds of written text from antiquity. Extant letters represent every level of Greco-Roman society from Egyptian peasants to Roman emperors. The letter served the most basic needs of day-to-day communication and the most highly developed art and ideology. The letter is also arguably the most important, and certainly the most prevalent type of literature in early Christianity.” [Stanley K. Stowers, “Letters: Greek and Latin Letters,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:290.]

<sup>25</sup>“There are four different sources for our knowledge of ancient letters: letters preserved through literary transmission, letters discovered in modern times, letters preserved in inscriptions, and letters embedded in other kinds of literature. Many Greek and Latin letters were preserved and copied because they were valued as literature by certain communities. The Greek letters of Plato, Isocrates, Demosthenes, and Libanius and the Latin letters of Cicero, Pliny, Seneca, and Fronto fit into this category, as do the Christian letters in the NT, of the Apostolic fathers, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, and Jerome. Letters preserved in this way tend to be more consciously literary than letters from the other categories and are often highly shaped by Greek or Latin rhetoric. Some letters in this category were written and collected with an eye toward publication. They also reflect a higher social level than other sorts of letters.

“If we had only letters preserved by literary transmission, we would know little about letter writing among the masses of common people in the Greco-Roman world. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries great quantities of texts were recovered during the excavations of towns and villages in the dryer parts of Egypt where papyrus could survive. These texts include many thousands of often fragmentary letters. A few show the influence of rhetorical and literary training, but most are simple communications involving business relations, legal appeals, friendship, and family matters. The papyrus letters together with those preserved by literary transmission provide a view of the whole world of letter writing from Hellenistic times to the Byzantine period. A number of letters, mostly from Hellenistic monarchs, were copied onto stone

for the difficulties modern researchers have encountered in developing clear, accurate systematic classifications of letters by their content.<sup>26</sup> One should note

as inscriptions. Such letters served as royal propaganda. Some Epicurean letters were inscribed in stone by a certain Diogenes in the Lycian city of Oenoanda. Finally a fairly large number of letters are found embedded in literary works. These appear most frequently in historical, biographical, and fictional narratives (see Acts 15:23–29).”

[Stanley K. Stowers, “Letters: Greek and Latin Letters,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:290–291.]

<sup>26</sup>“More important for the general practice of letter writing are epistolary handbooks. The apostle Paul and many other writers of Christian letters in the first three centuries reflect a handbook knowledge of letter writing style and theory. These handbooks fall into two types. The first kind are systematic treatises which show an interest in theory and a knowledge of rhetoric. The two extant representatives are the *Epistolary Types* also attributed to Demetrius of Phalerum and the *Epistolary Kinds* attributed in different manuscript traditions either to Libanius or Proclus. The first, in its original form, is probably from pre-Christian times and the latter is dated between the 4th and 6th centuries A.D. The handbook of ‘Demetrius’ seems to have been written for professional letter writers in service to public officials. It discusses 21 types of letters. For each letter, ‘Demetrius’ and ‘Libanius’ provide a brief definition and a very brief sample letter often in the form of a rhetorical syllogism which captures the logic of the type. The handbook of Libanius discusses 41 types.

“It is important to understand the interests of these handbooks and their approach to classifying letters. They show very little interest in style and structure. Rather each type represents a characteristic social occasion and shows how a certain social transaction could be effected by a letter. Thus, for instance, one writes a blaming letter when a social equal or inferior has failed properly to reciprocate benefits conferred by the writer. The letter informs the recipient that he or she has failed in this way and attempts to shame the recipient mildly, but not so as to destroy the basic relationship. The rhetorical tradition often used such stereotyped occasions for speech acts to classify speaking into genres. The broadest of these are the three divisions of rhetoric: The forensic speech of the law-court; the advising speech of the city council; the epideictic speech for praising good and criticizing evil. Most of the types of letters in the handbooks belong to the category of praise and blame and only a handful to the other divisions of rhetoric. Several letters in this category are types of exhortation and are so treated by the handbooks (e.g. letters of parenthesis, consolation, admonition, rebuke, reproach).

“A second kind of handbook is represented by the bilingual, Greek and Latin, Bologna Papyrus (3d or 4th century A.D.) and by model letters for students to copy (3d century B.C.–5th century A.D.). These show no interest in theory or rhetoric and often reflect only minimal literacy. The two kinds of letter-writing handbooks either aim at the beginning and advanced stages of education or were designed for people from different social-educational levels. The letters in the NT and among the writings of the Apostolic Fathers clearly reflect a knowledge of the more advanced level of handbook although not of advanced rhetorical training.”

[Stanley K. Stowers, “Letters: Greek and Latin Letters,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New

from the ancient handbook sources that especially the more literary kinds of letters that include those of the NT gave great emphasis to the Greek social role of friendship.<sup>27</sup> The literary structural form (discussed above) is relatively simple and virtually universal.

The complexity of the process of composition will be the focus of this part of the study. It will center on two major aspects: the dictation of the contents of the letter to a writing secretary, and the mechanical process of composition.

a) **Amanuensis.** The writing secretary, called γραμματεὺς in ancient Greek and *amanuensis* in Latin, functioned in a variety of roles.<sup>28</sup> In the 62 uses of the term γραμματεὺς inside the NT, the Jewish background is very prominent in all but five of the 62 uses showing up in the four gospels.<sup>29</sup> That Paul utilized writing secretaries in the composition of his letters is evidenced from several sources: 1) his direct statement [1 Cor. 16:21 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.]; 2) the

York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:291.]  
<sup>27</sup>“The letters of more educated people and literary letters are especially characterized by the ethos and conventions of Greek friendship. Classical Greek culture privileged friendship between male peers as the highest form of social relationship. The epistolary theorists assumed that the letter of friendship was both the most basic and highest form of letter writing. Consequently the ethos and language of Greek friendship shaped Greco-Roman letter writing as a whole although that of upper class writers more than others. The ethos of friendship was largely expressed through a set of standard themes and commonplace expressions: The letter is a friendly conversation; friends reciprocate in all things; friends will sacrifice for one another; friends are frank with one another; through the letter friends are together though physically apart (1 Cor 5:3; 1 Thess 2:17; Col 2:5); the letter contains an image of the writer’s character; the letter is a consolation for a friend’s absence; expressions of joy upon receiving a friend’s letter; expressions of longing for a friend (2 Cor 1:16; 1 Thess 3:6–10; Phil 22; 2 John 12; 3 John 14).” [Stanley K. Stowers, “Letters: Greek and Latin Letters,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:292.]

<sup>28</sup>One of the most important contributions to understanding the role of the writing secretary in the English speaking world is E. R. Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*. WUNT 2.42. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991. This PhD dissertation from SWBTS in Fort Worth has been updated to *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* from InterVarsity Press, 2004.

<sup>29</sup>“סוֹפֵר ‘scribe’ or ‘secretary,’ was a title of royal officials,<sup>4</sup> and only from the time of Ezra,<sup>5</sup> Neh., 1 Ch. and Sir. did it come to denote a man learned in the Torah, cf. also the earliest Rabbinic traditions (13 Berakha of the 18 petitions in Meg. Ta’an, 12).<sup>6</sup> Apart from a few isolated occurrences in the Tannaitic period,<sup>7</sup> the NT is our final witness for this use of סוֹפֵר / γραμματεὺς. Neither Philo nor Josephus<sup>8</sup> uses the term for biblical scholars of their own day. In post-Christian Rabbinic literature the rabbis of the day are called תַּכְמִיּוֹת, while סוֹפְרִים is used for scholars of an earlier period, and in everyday life for biblical instructors and secretaries (cf. γραμματεὺς in Josephus).<sup>9</sup>” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 1:740–741.]



naming of one of them specifically [Rom. 16:22 I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.]; 3) his adherence to the basic patterns normative in first century letter writing [2 Thess. 3:17. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write; Col. 3:18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.].

Among government officials and wealthier individuals in Paul’s world, a slave in the household would have been trained in one of the specialized schools in Rome and elsewhere for proper writing. This individual would then function as the secretary for his master. He would be able to guide his master in the dictation of the letter so that it could be put in the best proper form possible.

Paul did not have such resources as properly trained individuals to function as secretaries. But, he had a number of associates such as Silas, Timothy, Luke etc. who traveled with him and possessed the basic skills for composing written letters.

As Dr. Richards illustrates, and well documents, the relationship between the one dictating the letter and the

secretary doing the writing of it was crucial. These associates of Paul, out of working and traveling with the apostle, came to know Paul's thinking quite well. Most of the time they were well informed about the situations existing in the churches where Paul was sending a letter. This gave them greater latitude in the composition process. The dictation process normally took on one of two basic patterns. Either the sender dictated word for word the contents of the letter, or more often he merely sketched out the basic ideas and the secretary filled in the details by mimicking closely the writing style of the sender as he understood it.<sup>30</sup> One needs to remember that in the educational process, learning to write by young boys in that world was fundamentally by mimicking the writings of the great philosophers who were perceived to be the models for proper writing of Greek. The practice in doing this along with learning the basics of rhetoric which defined writing strategies gave Timothy and the other associates of Paul the needed skills to do this work for him.

**b) Logistics of drafts before final copy.** The basic mechanics of composition are important to understand, because they are so different from anything we do in the modern world.<sup>31</sup>

The process began with the Paul discussing the contents of a proposed letter with Timothy, for example as the writing secretary. They would discuss the situation of the church and what Paul needed to say in the letter. Once agreement was reached on the basic points to be made in the letter, Timothy would produce a first draft copy written on a series of wooden tablets. As the picture of one from that world on the right illustrates, the indented portion of the wooden block would have wax filling it. For writing purposes the wax would be warmed to the proper temperature to soften it but not melt it.

Next, Timothy working on his own would take a stylus of some type and begin writing out the contents of the letter. As is obvious, this would take considerable time to sketch out a draft of a letter, particularly if it were lengthy such as Romans, 1-2 Corinthians etc. Quite a number of writing tablets would be required, but these could be strapped together in the proper sequence as

<sup>30</sup>This latter pattern is so liberating. In my last pastorate before beginning my teaching career at SWBTS in 1974, I had a personal secretary who was amazingly skilled at taking dictation. After Margaret and I had worked together for a short period of time beginning in 1968, my letters were basically composed by her. I would simply indicate the basic topics to be put in the letter, and shortly later she would hand me the draft for checking which seldom ever needed any modification from the way it would have been written had I composed it myself. She knew my mind better than I did!

<sup>31</sup>A helpful discussion of this can be found in my page *THE ORIGIN OF THE BIBLE*, under topic [3.1.1 HOW DID PEOPLE WRITE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD?](#). This is located at [cranfordville.com](http://cranfordville.com) under Bible Studies.

the holes in the above picture illustrate.

Then, this first draft would be brought back to Paul for his analysis. The two would sit down together and go through this first draft word by word. By heating up the tablets, needed corrections could be inserted into the proper place in the text. This process could and normally was repeated three or four times before the wording of the letter was just the way Paul wanted it to be. Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the mid first century suggested that a minimum of three revisions were required, each with a different objective, in order to get the document in the best form in content, wording, and language.

Once the draft form was revised to a final stage in meetings between the two, then Timothy would carefully copy the contents from the wax tablets to papyrus leaves for the final copy. The leaves would be carefully 'glued' together end to end so they could be rolled up into a scroll length wise. Normally at this period of time only one side of the papyrus leaf would be written on in order to be able to create a scroll in a manner that would protect the contents from being seen until the sealed scroll was unrolled and read.

This final draft now on papyrus would be taken once more to Paul and the two would go through it carefully to make sure everything was exactly as Paul wanted. At that point, Paul would take up the pen for writing on the papyrus and add what ever Sender Verification expression he desired at the very end of the letter in the Conclusio section. Often it would be the entire contents of the Conclusio itself. It was at this point that the letter became 'official' since it was now in finalized form and ready to be sent to the designated recipients. Typically the scroll would then be sealed with a baked clay seal something like a modern button with leather straps placed through the holes in the seal and around the scroll where they then would be tied together to keep the scroll rolled up and protected.

Although it is not clear from the limited evidence, it is likely that, before the letter went out to its designated readers, a copy of it would be made for Paul to keep. What is clear from existing evidence is that when the first house church group read the letter, or more likely, when it was read to them by Paul's assistant who had carried the letter to them, a copy of it was prepared before he went on to the next house church group in the city to present the letter to the next group. This would be repeated until every house group in the city was covered.

The reading of the letter was a joyous occasion mostly because it was a direct communication from their beloved missionary Paul. His insights were valued and this written expression to them would be treasured

and referred to repeatedly over the subsequent years. By having an assistant carry the letter and then read it to each assembled group, the assistant could then answer any questions for clarification about what Paul had said. Often this person would be the second designated 'sender' in the Superscriptio who very likely was the writer of the letter originally. With him listed officially in the letter, he had the necessary credentials to speak authoritatively in Paul's behalf.

Over the decades, the church groups from different cities would share their copy of Paul's letter to them with other churches in different places that had letters to them from Paul. Gradually a collection of all of Paul's letters, sometime after his death in the mid 60s, came together and then began to be circulated as a collection of letters to different Christian communities that he had not written letters to during his life time.

Out of convenience, in these collections the individual letters were grouped by descending length with Romans being the longest and Philemon being the shortest of the thirteen letters.<sup>32</sup> The sequential listing has absolutely nothing to do with the chronology of their writing, nor with the location either of their composition nor the location of the recipients. It was strictly a matter of convenience for copying purposes. This was true in the first two or three centuries on papyrus and from the fourth century onward primarily on tanned leather parchment called vellum that was bound in codex style rather than in a scroll format.

**Why is it important to know about the composition of ancient letters?** The contention of Stanley Stowers that Romans has not been seriously read as a letter and thus has been grossly misinterpreted is enough to get our attention.<sup>33</sup> Although many of his

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<sup>32</sup>In a few circumstances later on when Hebrews was thought to be from Paul it typically would be inserted between Romans and First Corinthians in the proper order of descending length. The present sequential location of Hebrews after Philemon established in the middle 300s reflects a growing tendency to disconnect Hebrews from Paul. But its location in front of the *seven* general letters -- James to Jude [also in descending order of sequence] -- indicates something of the 'limbo' state for Hebrews from the fourth century onward.

<sup>33</sup>According to Stowers, interpreters of Romans, at least from Augustine onward, have persistently misread the letter by superimposing upon it anachronistic schemes of Christian doctrine and failing to understand its original purpose and audience. Paul had no conception, Stowers asserts, of 'Christianity' as a new religion or of Christians as a 'third race' distinct from Jews and Gentiles. If that is so, Romans must be read very differently. One tragic consequence of the traditional misreading has been to produce anti-Jewish interpretations of many passages in the letter. Stowers insists, however, that such interpretations can be overcome by a more historical reading. His programmatic question is this: 'How can one read Romans afresh as a letter from the Greco-Roman world of the first century C.E.?' (6). Such a reading will seek to identify the cul-

claims cannot be substantiated, his work does underscore the importance of understanding the role and composition of letters in the ancient world, and how that can help the interpretive process.<sup>34</sup>

As I have maintained for several decades in the seminary and university classroom on both sides of the Atlantic with undergraduates, master's students and PhD students, [every written text](#) past, present or future has both literary and historical dimensions. To ignore any of the relevant aspects of these two traits is to condemn oneself to false interpretation of the text.<sup>35</sup>

Every text has a context which must be given proper consideration in the interpretive process. As a GWU colleague of mine used to say to his classes, "A text without a context is a pretext!" Increasingly the current biblical scholarly world is recognizing the value of this more wholistic approach to exegeting biblical texts. The dominate exegetical approach today usually goes by the label "socio-rhetorical exegesis" or some similar label. Implicit in this and the related labels is the recognition of both historical and literary dimensions of a biblical text.<sup>36</sup>

My professional teaching career spanned the period of the 1970s through 2008, when in the North American scene, literary critical studies of various kinds were gaining a foothold in biblical studies. As is true of every supposed 'new movement,' extremes of claims were made early on, and especially in abstract liberal arts types of disciplines such as biblical studies. The tendency of the old 'scientific method' assumptions was to begin with demonstrating the inadequacies of the present existing historical approaches and then move to the exaggerated claims that a shift to literary approaches would provide an 'exegetical nirvana.' Of course, this was a complete hoax. Interestingly, even the first commentaries in the 1970s touting adherence to literary approaches found themselves being forced to turn to the

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tural codes that were available to Paul's first-century Gentile readers and to show how the letter might be intelligible in the context of these codes." [Richard B. Hays, "The Gospel Is the Power of God for Salvation to Gentiles Only"? A Critique of Stanley Stowers' A Rereading of Romans," in *Critical Review of Books in Religion: 1996* (Atlanta, GA: Journal of the American Academy of Religion and the Journal of Biblical Literature, 1996), 26–28.]

<sup>34</sup>Stowers presentation represents one of the many influences of Krister Stendahl's very pivotal article [The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West](#).

<sup>35</sup>For a less technical detailed explanation, see my lecture notes [3.1 THE HISTORICAL AND LITERARY ASPECTS OF A TEXT](#) to freshman undergraduate students in New Testament 102 at Gardner-Webb University.

<sup>36</sup>One should not take from this statement the assumption of a uniform pattern of adoption of either historical or literary understandings. The exegetical landscape is littered with a huge array of differing and often contradictory perspectives.



historical dimensions over and over in order to establish a necessary foundation for literary analysis of the biblical texts. That the biblical texts are rooted in ancient history is inescapable. Some four or five decades later a healthier balance between the historical and literary perspectives dominates the American scene today.<sup>37</sup>

Some brief explanation of the implications of this wholistic approach to exegesis is necessary. For the sake of logical clarity to undergraduate freshman university students, the [sub-categories](#) of external / internal were adopted and are presented here for you:

**Historical Aspects:**

1. External Aspects
2. Internal Aspects



**Literary Aspects:**

1. External Aspects
- 2 Internal Aspects

These rather arbitrary terms stress important recognitions about the nature of composing texts. They also imply utilization of insights from a wide range of contemporary exegetical methodologies.

In the Historical Aspects, the sub-category **External Aspects** centers on both the **Compositional History** of the text and its **Transmission History**. That is, how was the text written in the beginning and then how has that text been transmitted to subsequent generations from the first century world down to the present day. The compositional history works off the traditional Historical Exegetical Methodology that has been in place since the 1700s. The **Transmission History** focuses primarily on Text Critical analysis of the hand copying of manuscripts containing this biblical text with the objective of establishing the most likely original wording of

<sup>37</sup>The European story of this period is completely different than on the western side of the Atlantic. With European culture so deeply rooted in history, there was little inclination to turn loose of a fundamentally historical approach to biblical exegesis. In general European scholars viewed their North American colleagues as a 'cut flower' scholarship with little or no lasting roots. Today that picture in Europe is also finding a better balance with slow acceptance of literary dimensions of the text, but mostly with a Literary Kritik based in late 1800 and early 1900 focus on literary analysis and with some adoption of the North American approaches.

One of the interesting ironies that I observed about the North American plunge into literary critical approaches early on especially was that the literary methods often being adopted and modified in North America originated in European literary disciplines outside of biblical studies, e.g. Structuralism. Few, if any of them, were 'native' to North America in their roots.

The reality for both North America and Europe is that the two differing approaches reflect differing culture based attitudes toward history and this surfaces strongly in how texts -- religious and non religious; ancient and modern -- are handled on both sides of the Atlantic.

With deep influences stemming from having lived and studied in both cultures, my more wholistic approach to exegesis seeks to strike a healthy balance between the two perspectives. But then the functional reality is that this puts me into a 'no man's land' between the two with critics from both sides. But my west Texas rootage tells me that this is the best validation of correctness possible.

the passage. The earliest copy of the entire Greek New Testament dates from the fourth century. No original copies exist today.

The sub-category **Internal Aspects** centers on proper identification of time and place markers contained inside the passage itself. Here particular attention is given to expressions of **Social History** as well as to relevant aspects of **Formal History**. Not only history as the story of major events and people (Formal History) but the nature of social interaction inside the various sub-cultures of the first century Mediterranean world (Social History) play a critical role in comprehending the meaning inside a passage that is so rooted in that history.

On the *Literary Analysis* side, **External Aspects** centers on proper identification of the use of established **Literary Forms**, i.e., genre, from sources elsewhere in the biblical text and the surrounding cultural sources of both Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. The first century literary world was packed full of well established forms that facilitated quick and clear communication of ideas, and the biblical writers took extensive advantage of these. But most of these forms do not exist in modern literary tradition. They are time and culture specific, and thus must be understood in their world, if the text using them is to be properly interpreted. The use of many methodologies in modern Literary Criticism, when applied to biblical studies, is generally quite sensitive to these qualities, and thus very valuable to the interpretive process.

Additionally, the **Literary Context** of a passage in the Bible is just as important to proper understanding as it is to modern literature. Writing strategies common in the ancient world hugely influenced the biblical writers, particularly those out of the Jewish background. Most of those strategies are mystifying to a modern reader without foundational understanding. Identifying why a passage comes at a certain place inside a document is of utmost importance. What precedes and comes after it establishes clear limits on possible meanings of the passage itself. One must avoid the common fatale error of older commentators. The thinking processes particularly in a Post-Enlightenment western world have almost no counterpart in the ancient world. And particularly in a Jewish and older Hebrew way of thinking. These modern patterns must not be overlaid onto the biblical text as though Paul, for example, ever thought the way we do.

The **Internal Aspects** centers on the crafting of primary and secondary ideas inside the passage itself. Here I have developed a procedure of [Block Diagramming](#) of the passage in order to highlight more clearly those relationships. Completing this procedure utilizes



the basic concepts of Greek grammar in terms of sentence structure, word analysis etc. But when analyzing this highlighted rhetorical structure of the passage, elements of Discourse Analysis, Structuralism etc. are utilized for comprehending the mind of the writer of the text.

As I have discovered, along with literally hundreds of students trained in this methodology, that by the time such an analysis of the biblical text is completed a clear understanding of what the author was seeking to communicate emerges. The subsequent exegesis of the text becomes mostly a written expression of this understanding. Also what I have observed from teaching this approach to PhD students down to freshman undergraduate students in Bible survey classes is that this can be done profitably with a wide variety of skill levels. Additionally, from having taught lay folks in churches how to do this, indications have come in abundance of how it helped them read the Bible much more profitably.<sup>38</sup> Where published diagrams on the individual letters of Paul are available at [cranfordville.com](http://cranfordville.com), I will note these with a hyperlink in these chapters.

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### **Analysis Procedure for the Letters of Paul**

In examining each of the thirteen letters of Paul beginning in this chapter nine, we will focus mainly on the background issues and a synopsis of the content especially of the letter body section of each of the letters. This overview functions in the commentary series [Biblical Insights](#) as an introduction to the detailed exegesis of each of his letters in the separate volumes of the online commentary. Also it will amount to an overview commentary on each letter, as opposed to the indepth commentaries listed as individual volumes in the BIC series.

Note that the analysis of each of Paul's letters is done in chronological order of its composition. In places where a different chronology is found, detailed reasons for the adopted chronology will be provided. Careful attention will be given under the Praescriptio section to the ministry context of the apostle at the time of the composition of each letter, as well as information about the designated recipient(s) of each letter. At various points in the discussion of each letter referencing of the history of interpretation for the letter will be provided.

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<sup>38</sup>For interested individuals, a full series of studies are available at [cranfordville.com](http://cranfordville.com) in the page [MAKING SENSE OF THE BIBLE](#). This material was developed and taught initially to an adult Bible class at the International Baptist Church of San José, Costa Rica. The series of studies can also be completed as a self-study course as well as a group study.