



News from the Blue Ridge



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Family Events:

Sometimes, incidental things turn into important moments in one's life. That's what happened to me at the end of January. With the substantial weight loss I've undergone, I've lost my 'padding' that helps insulate me from the cold weather. Consequently, as cold weather hit periodically this winter in January and increasingly toward the end of February, I've had to scramble to find enough clothes to keep me warm.

One particular difficulty has been my head. Not having worn hats much at all since my youth, I didn't have any hats around to keep my head reasonably warm on cold days.



While digging around one morning looking for something, I came across the western hats that I'd inherited from my father years ago. They were the right size and the felt hat looked okay. To my delight it worked well in keeping my head comfortable. Plus, I found a deep satisfaction in reconnecting to some of my roots. Of course, the western hat caught a great deal of

attention on campus among students and colleagues with the resulting good natured teasing.

But the pleasure in reconnecting and the enjoyment in wearing this type of hat again prompted me to buy my own so that I wouldn't risk my father's hat that has so many very special memories associated with it. The hat has become a personal symbol to me of the beginnings of a new life -- post cancer and with new opportunities for many years of healthy living ahead. The past several months of having to dig deep down inside to find resources to fight the unrelenting pain in my body has brought me back to the fighting spirit of my west Texas roots. By now it has become common place around campus so that without it, the questions come about where is my hat.



One particularly interesting aspect has also surfaced. Having lived in small town Boiling Springs now for over four years I've learned to recognize some of the local town folk, although most I don't know by name. With the rather extensive farm and ranch activity around Boiling Springs, some of these individuals have begun waving to me as they pass in their cars and pickups. Somehow I've become less the university professor, and more a regular kind of fellow to them -- with a hat.

Sometimes, you never know what impact a seemingly incidental moment may eventually have upon your life.



University Happenings:

The first week of March is spring break at Gardner-Webb. For me it is a most welcomed break from a hectic pace during the first half of the semester. Yet, for the first time in almost thirty years spring break will not mean personal and professional development by attending the regional SBL and NABPR meetings. The health issues, although greatly improving, are far from being back to normal, so I've come to grips with my mortality and decided to use the spring break as a time for rest and recuperation. Some projects at the office here at home will occupy my attention, and a day long seminar on Adobe Acrobat in Charlotte on Friday, but no trip to Atlanta to the southeastern regional meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion meetings this time. Although I will sorely miss the fellowship and the intellectual stimulation of the meetings.

One acknowledgment that brings a certain pride of accomplishment is that I was granted tenure at the spring trustee board meeting at the end of February. The most meaningful aspect is the affirmation of colleagues, since the process of being granted tenure is the result of the recommendation of the faculty and administration to the university board of trustees. This I value above all else.

On another note. I continue to be amazed, even after four years at GWU, at the difference between GWU and SWBTS around trustee board meeting times. At the seminary, increasingly in the late 80s and 90s one didn't have to ask when the seminary trustees were on campus for their fall and spring meetings. The atmosphere was so tense on campus you could cut it with a knife. The only comic relief was the ridiculous extremes that the seminary administration often went to in preparing for the meeting, including on at least a couple of occasions painting the lawn around the president's home green while the grass everywhere else on campus was dead brown! Most all faculty waited anxiously until the trustees were gone at the end of the two or three day meeting and hoped the damage done by them wouldn't be too bad. One could feel a collective sigh of relief across the campus when the last trustee left.

On the other hand, at GWU I have hardly known when a trustee board meeting was taking place. No tension, no apprehension beforehand, just a report to the faculty afterwards about their actions. The relationship between trustees and faculty is harmonious and the trustees go out of their way to affirm the faculty and their support of the faculty. It has been an enormously refreshing difference for me after the years of tension and confrontation that I witnessed prior to coming to GWU. I delight in working at a truly Christian university where basic Christian principles guide what is done.

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Claire's Musings:

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The best part of the past month is that Lorin seems to be feeling better all the time. We are so thankful for each improvement no matter how small.

As much as I love my job, I am becoming more tired and just trying to get through the normal "first year" adjustments of a new job. I like working in the library and I am learning so much about the books. The best part is the enthusiasm of the students who love to read. It's fun, too, when a student or a teacher is trying to find something special and I am able to locate it for them. The school hours are long and I still have not been able to find help. I had a couple of mothers volunteer, but they didn't last long. It's difficult enough trying to keep up with the job and now I am already falling behind in my university class.

Thanks goodness Lorin is so understanding. Now I am finally able to have someone come in every other week and clean the house. Amy is very nice lady who is full of energy (unlike me at this point) and she does a good job. She even brought us some homemade Amish bread one time. It's such a relief to have one less thing to worry about. This gives me more time to work on school work at home. At this point in my life I would have thought that I would be preparing for retirement. That seems like such a long way off.

to God for the recipients is found and it follows very closely the pattern of invocational prayer of thanksgiving used in the ancient Jewish synagogue. Most NT scholars working in this area are convinced this reflects a common pattern in early Christian worship as Christians naturally used the synagogue as their initial model for worship in the beginning decades of the Christian movement.

Body. The main contents of the letter are developed according to the topics and stylistic skills of the composer. And great variation is found in the 21 documents of the NT. One important note here: letters were composed as a response to perceived needs among the initial readers, and, as a rule, address specific situations. This is particularly the case with the letters of Paul.

Conclusio. This final section contains typically a wide range of miscellaneous items, including Sender Verification, Greetings, Benediction, among other items. Almost always, the ancient letter ended with a concluding prayer, reflecting the very religious orientation of the ancient world.

Hebrews and James are documents that have only minimal letter aspects. James only contains a Praescriptio, and Hebrews a Conclusio. The remainder of both letters is actually in the form of an ancient Jewish homily or sermon. Because the letter form was so important, these letter elements were incorporated as a way to make them more acceptable written communications.

Next month we'll explore some of the details of both groups of letters. Paul took the basic form and expanded it in very creative ways and in the process became a model for several decades that later Christian writers sought to copy.



Lorin's Musings:

"What's the next best thing to being there?" When our presence is not possible, how can we communicate effectively

to people we deeply want to connect to? In our world, we have the options of picking up a phone, sending an email, or any number of other communications that make connections quickly and effectively with others. In the first Christian century, the basic choice was a letter.

The most common literary form in the New Testament is the *letter*. It comprises 21 of the 27 documents in the New Testament. **Paul's letters** comprise the largest section, beginning with Romans and ending with Philemon. One side note: the sequential arrangement of them has nothing to do with when they were written. The listing of them is solely based on length with the longest letter, Romans, at the beginning of the list and the shortest letter, Philemon, at the end of the list. Where two letters are written to the same church or individual, e.g., 1 and 2 Corinthians, the length of the first letter determines the position of both letters.

The second group of letters in the New Testament are typically known as the **General Letters** or the Catholic (meaning general) Letters. Technically, this group begins with James and ends with Jude. And it is also based on sequentially descending length in the same way as the Pauline letters. James is the longest, followed by 1 Peter (w. 2 Peter), then 1 John (w. 2 & 3 John) and then Jude. The symbolism of the number seven played an important role in the acceptance of these documents into this section of the New Testament canon in the early church.

Hebrews, which had great difficulty gaining acceptance into the canon of the New Testament, eventually wound up being "stuck in" between the Pauline corpus and the general letter corpus because of its association with Paul in the fourth century AD in some Christian circles. This became the basis of its acceptance into the canon. Its position outside the Pauline corpus is indicative of early church reluctance to accept it as having come directly from Paul. Only among some Christian groups was this view held; most early church leaders were convinced Paul had nothing to do with it, but they had a wide diversity of opinion about who may have been responsible for composing it.

The **genre of letter** in the ancient world is especially important for our interpreting the contents of these documents. First, letters were written according to certain forms that are significantly different than letter writing in our world. The core elements as they are known by their technical labels are:

Praescriptio. This is the 'pre-writing' that contains indication of who is sending the letter (*Superscriptio*), to whom the letter is being sent (*Adscriptio*) and a word of greeting (*Salutatio*). For a more detailed discussion see "The Genre of the New Testament" at <http://cranfordville.com/NT-genre.htm>. Thus the ancient reader(s) knew at the outset the basic information regarding the identification of the origin of the contents. Plus, a bridge of connection was established between sender and receiver at the beginning of the letter.

Proem. This was a prayer for divine blessing upon the recipient(s) of the letter. The content of the prayer as well as the deity being addressed varied widely in ancient letters. Within the Pauline corpus, however, a consistent form of giving thanks