



The Apostle Paul, Servant of Christ



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Overview Study Guide Unit 3, Chapter 9 "Paul's Early Writing Ministry"

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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

Timeline of Paul's Ministry

Missionary Activity	Writing Ministry
I. Paul's early ministry A. Conversion and early activities (AD 33-46) B. <i>First missionary journey</i> (AD 46-47), Acts 13:1-14:28	Galatians, AD 47 (?) (From Antioch)
C. Jerusalem council (AD 48), Acts 15:1-35; Gal 2:1-10	
II. Paul's middle period of ministry A. <i>The second missionary journey</i> (ca. AD 48-51), Acts 15:36-18:22	I. Paul's Early Writing Ministry Galatians, AD 49* (From Macedonia) 1 Thessalonians AD 50 (From Athens) 2 Thessalonians AD 50 (From Corinth)
B. <i>The third missionary journey</i> (ca AD 52-57), Acts 18:23-21:16	II. Paul's Middle Period Writing Ministry 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)
III. Paul's final period of ministry A. Arrest in Jerusalem (AD 57), Acts 21:17-23:22	Prison Letters. Colossians, AD 57-60 (From Caesarea) Ephesians (From Caesarea) Philemon (From Caesarea) (Possibly Philippians also)
B. Imprisonment in Caesarea (AD 57-60), Acts 23:23-26:32	
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; Phlm 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.	Pastoral Letters, 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; 4:7-21.	2 Timothy, AD 64 (From Rome)

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 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.¹ 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

¹Although 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.]



Paul's Letters to Churches



Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Praescriptio	Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ
Superscriptio	πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις,
Adscriptio	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.
Salutatio	Eὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ μνείᾳ ὑμῶν...
Proem	Γινώσκειν δὲ ὑμᾶς βούλομαι, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ μᾶλλον εἰς προκοπὴν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἐλήλυθεν, ὥστε τοὺς δεσμούς μου φανερούς ἐν Χριστῷ γενέσθαι ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ πραιτωρίῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς πάσιν, ...
Body	'Ασπάσασθε πάντα ἄγιον ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ ἀδελφοί.
Conclusio	'Ασπάσασθε πάντα ἄγιον ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. ἀσπάζονται ὑμᾶς οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ ἀδελφοί.

Ancient Letter on papyrus
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 his childhood teacher, the philosopher Aristotle, to develop a ‘simplified’ version of the Greek language that these ‘Barbarians’ could learn to use.² In the end, it 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.³

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.⁴ By form, however, is meant

²Many today would question just how much simpler Koine 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!

³To 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 quite the 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.

⁴Interestingly, 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

the general arrangement on the letter units. The ancient handbooks give greater emphasis to the different purposes of the letter as the basis of their system of form classification. But in these different types of letters based on their purpose, a common literary structure was adhered to in the vast majority of instances.

The modern study of ancient Greek letter forms is a relatively new discipline in the larger field of New Testament studies.⁵ But it is one that is increasingly

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 behavior (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.

⁵One 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, *Parakalō. Form, Funktion und Sinn der parakalō-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 Page 851

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 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.⁶ Also the work of Professor [William G. Doty](#) in his [*Letters in Primitive Christianity*](#) first published in 1973 has been very influential as well.⁷ 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

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.]

⁶During 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.

⁷Other 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](#).

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.⁸

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 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.⁹

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

⁸For 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](#).

⁹Only 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.

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 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' ἄνθρώπων ούδὲ δί'
ἄνθρωπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς
τοῦ ἐγέραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, **καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ**
πάντες ἀδελφοί

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' ἄνθρώπων, **not from men**

ούδὲ δί' ἄνθρωπου, **neither through a man**

ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, **but through Jesus Christ**

καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς, and God the Father

τοῦ ἐγέραντος 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 οὖσιν 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 οὖσιν [ἐν Ἔφεσῷ] 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 οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις 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. τοῖς 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.¹⁰

¹⁰Several 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 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 di-

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 τοῖς 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 τῇ οὖσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ,
ἥγιασμένοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, κλητοῖς ἀγίοις, σὺν πᾶσιν
τοῖς ἐπικαλουμένοις τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ
Χριστοῦ ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ, αὐτῶν καὶ ἡμῶν.

versity 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. .

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 Ἀπφίᾳ τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν καὶ τῇ κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκιλησίᾳ,

To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, 2 to Apphia 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 συστρατιώτῃ 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 εἰρήνῃ, **grace to you and peace**. The χάρις part reflects the traditional Greek greeting but with a distinctive Christian twist. The εἰρήνῃ part comes out of the traditional Hebrew greeting both oral and written as מַלְאָכִים, shālōm, meaning peace. The very core Salutatio in Paul is χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνῃ 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 εἰρήνῃ 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 εἰρήνῃ ἀπὸ Θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 4 τοῦ δόντος ἐαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέληται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, 5 ὃ ἡ δόξα είς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, 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 contained 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.¹¹ Being acknowledged as a friend played a central role to establishing social networks of connections in business, in social activities, in life generally.¹² 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

¹¹“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: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 380–381.]

¹²The basic terms are בָּנִי 'ohav, תְּדַס sodh, יָמֵן rea'; ἔταιρος hetairoς; 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.]

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 ἀσπάζομαι, Greetings expressions in the Conclusio unit at the end of the letter.¹³ The sender of 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.

¹³33.20 ἀσπάζομαι; ἀσπασμός, οῦ m: to employ certain set phrases as part of the process of greeting, whether communicated directly or indirectly—to greet, to send greetings.’

ἀσπάζομαι: προστρέχοντες ἡσπάζοντο 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 ‘greeting the church.’

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

33.21 ἀπασπάζομαι: to say goodbye—to bid goodbye to, to take leave of.’ ἀπησπασάμεθα 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^b: to employ a formalized expression of greeting, implying a wish for happiness on the part of the person greeted—‘hail, greetings.’ ἤρχαντο ἀσπάζεσθαι αὐτόν, Χαῖρε, βασιλεῦ τῶν Ἰουδαίον ‘they began to greet him, Hail, King of the Jews’ Mk 15:18. The functional equivalent of χαίρω^b 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 ἐπιτρεψόν μοι ἀποτάξασθαι τοῖς εἰς τὸν οἴκον μου ‘first let me go and say goodbye to my family’ Lk 9:61.

33.24 ἔρρωσθε^b: to end a letter by means of the expression ἔρρωσθε (ἔρρωσσω in some manuscripts), always having a favorable connotation—‘goodbye.’ ἐξ ὕν διατηροῦντες ἔαντοὺς εὐ πράξετε. ‘Errosoθε ‘you will do well if you keep yourselves from doing these things. Goodbye’ Ac 15:29. Since in Ac 15:29 ἔρρωσθε 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 ἔρρωσθε 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.]

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 Αγαπητέ, περὶ πάντων εὖχομαι σε εύοδοῦσθαι καὶ ψυσίνειν, καθὼς εὐόδουται σου ἡ ψυχή. 3 ἐχάρην γὰρ λίαν ἐρχομένων ἀδελφῶν καὶ μαρτυρούντων σου τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, καθὼς σὺ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ περιπατεῖς. 4 μειζοτέραν τούτων οὐκ ἔχω χαράν, 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 your soul is prospering.¹⁴ 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 Θεὸς..., 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 ἔτερον 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 highlights 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 highlights perceived spiritual needs in the congregations. The Expansion 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.

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.¹⁵ Beyond what is automati-

¹⁴John'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!

¹⁵One of the best summations of the background and emergence of the discipline of "Introduction to the NT" studies is found in Werner Georg Kummel, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Hei-

cally 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](#).¹⁶

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 delberg: 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 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.

¹⁶For an inclusive survey of the general topic of rhetoric, ancient to modern, see "Rhetoric," [wikipedia.org](#).

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.¹⁷ He was a Diaspora Jew indeed with the 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).¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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), διδασκαλος (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

¹⁷The 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 secretaries 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](#).

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

¹⁹But 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..

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 δίδασκαλία 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 ὑγιαινούσης δίδασκαλίας, [sound doctrine](#). Even this translation is misleading. The participle adjective ὑγιαινούσης 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 ὑγιαινούσης δίδασκαλίας more naturally and correctly means teaching that produces spiritual 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.²⁰ 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

²⁰One 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 ὑγιαινούσης δίδασκαλίας 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 ἐτεροδιδάσκαλέω 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 δίδασκαλία and wrongly understanding the role of the participle adjective ὑγιαινούσης. 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. .

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 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.²¹

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 ὦν 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

²¹It 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.

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 development 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 xáriç 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.²²

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 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.

²²In 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.

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.²³ 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.²⁴ The letter was used in a wide range of communications ranging from formal to informal personal expressions.²⁵ This is one of the

²³For 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

²⁴"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.]

²⁵"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 Ci-

reasons for the difficulties modern researchers have encountered in developing clear, accurate systematic classifications of letters by their content.²⁶ One should cero, 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 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.]

²⁶"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

note 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.²⁷ 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 γραμματεύς in ancient Greek and *amanuensis* in Latin, functioned in a variety of roles.²⁸ In the 62 uses of the

of these are the three divisions of rhetoric: The forensic speech of the lawcourt; 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 York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:291.]

²⁷“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.]

²⁸One 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.

term γραμματεύς inside the NT, the Jewish background is very prominent in all but five of the 62 uses showing up in the four gospels.²⁹ 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 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.³⁰ One needs to remem-

²⁹סְפִיר ‘scribe’ or ‘secretary,’ was a title of royal officials,⁴ and only from the time of Ezra,⁵ 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).⁶ Apart from a few isolated occurrences in the Tannaitic period,⁷ the NT is our final witness for this use of סְפִיר / γραμματεύς. Neither Philo nor Josephus⁸ uses the term for biblical scholars of their own day. In post-Christian Rabbinic literature the rabbis of the day are called טַבָּנִים, while סְפִיר is used for scholars of an earlier period, and in everyday life for biblical instructors and secretaries (cf. γραμματεύς in Josephus).⁹ [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 1:740–741.]

³⁰This 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 Mar-

ber 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.³¹

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 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 care-

garet 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!

³¹A 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 under Bible Studies.



fully 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.³² 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 the letter?

³²In 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.

sition 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.³³ Although many of his 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.³⁴

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.³⁵

Every text has a context which must be given proper consideration in the interpretative 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.³⁶

³³⁻⁴According 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 cultural 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.]

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

³⁵For 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.

³⁶One 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.

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 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.³⁷

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 recogni-

³⁷The 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 Literar 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.

tions 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 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.³⁸ Where published diagrams on the individual letters of Paul are available at cranfordville.com, I will note these with a hyperlink in these chapters.

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

³⁸For interested individuals, a full series of studies are available at cranfordville 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.

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.

Although in a minority view, I have been convinced for nearly three decades that Paul's letter to the Galatians, although the ninth book in the NT canon and the fourth letter in the Pauline section of that canon, is not only the first letter that he wrote which is in the NT canon, but also carries the distinction of being the earliest of all of the 27 documents in the NT. But the viewpoint I have adopted does not follow the typical South Galatian Theory advocates, most found among evangelical writers. Later, we will get to the reasons for my viewpoint further into this study.

9.1 Galatians: Introduction to BIC vol. 12.

Unquestionably, Galatians stands as one of the most influential documents inside the NT in so far a Protestant Christianity is concerned.³⁹ It played an important role in the early Protestant ministries of both Luther and Calvin, and continues that role in the denominational streams flowing out of these two reformers, which amounts to the vast majority of Protestant Christians.⁴⁰ The central emphasis upon 'justification

³⁹"One of Paul's major letters. Galatians has played a central role in Christian theology because it provides one of the NT's most explicit teachings on justification by faith. This teaching, however, is Paul's response to a serious crisis in the churches of Galatia rather than a systematic or doctrinal presentation of justification." [Frank J. Matera, "Galatians, Letter to The," ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 476.]

⁴⁰"The letter to the Galatians is one of the most studied letters of the New Testament. It is perhaps second in influence only to Romans among Paul's traditional 13 letters. It was the object of attention in early and medieval Christianity. Its influence increased during the Reformation period.

- Luther (1483–1546) lectured on it in 1519 and 1523. The substance of his lectures were later compiled into a commentary on it bearing his name (see Graebner, "Preface," iv—v).
- Calvin (1509–1564) cited it frequently in his Institutes, preached on it, and also wrote a commentary on it.
- In more recent times, Boice described it as the "Magna Carta of Christian liberty" ("Galatians," 403).
- Longenecker and Bruce, in large measure owing to the in-

by faith' in the letter stands as a hallmark of Protestantism, and thus elevates the status of the letter greatly.

The standard ancient letter structure is adhered to by Paul, but with one major exception. The Proem, the prayer of thanksgiving and intercession, is missing in this letter and is replaced with a traditional Greek rhetorical structure, the Exordium, that lays out in blunt terms Paul's agenda for the letter (cf. 1:6-10). More about that below. But in adopting this alternative pattern Paul puts his frustrations with the Galatians on the table very quickly and signals clearly what the letter is about.

9.1.1 Praescriptio, 1:1-5

1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ούδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, 2 καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοί

ταῖς ἑκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας,

3 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 4 τοῦ δόντος ἔαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἄμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέληται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, 5 ὃ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν.

1 Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—2 and all the members of God's family who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

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.

Here we discover the typical three elements of an ancient letter Praescriptio: Superscriptio (vv. 1-2a); Adscriptio (v. 2b); Salutatio (vv. 3-5).

Superscriptio, vv. 1-2a. The core name and title stand as the first two words in the letter: Παῦλος ἀπόστολος, Paul an apostle. Παῦλος is the Greek form of the apostle's name, with the Hebrew / Aramaic form נִיקַע (šā·’ûl) being written in Greek as Σαῦλος, which is found exclusively 15 times in the Acts of the Apostles. Interestingly, from the launching of the first missionary journey onward Luke switches over uniformly to Παῦλος (127 uses) in Acts.

The title ἀπόστολος, apostle, used here in the Superscriptio and 8 other times in the same place in

fluence of Galatians, characterized Paul as the "Apostle of Liberty" (1964) and "Apostle of the Free Spirit" (1977).

[James P. Sweeney, "Galatians, Letter to The," ed. John D. Barry and Lazarus Wentz, *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012).]

Paul's letters (1-2 Cor; Rom; Col; Eph; 1-2 Tim; Titus), stresses his assumed role of a spiritual leader in early Christianity on a level with the Twelve who were set apart by Jesus (cf. Lk. 6:13) for a special founding role in the Christian religion launched on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

The expansion elements in the Superscriptio build off this title and signal a major theme of the body proper of the letter. First, οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ούδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου, not from men nor through a man, anticipates the opening thesis of the body proper in 1:11-12 of the independency of Paul's apostleship to any authorization of the Twelve or of its leader Peter. Chapters one and two of the body proper will demonstrate this independency with a series of 'proofs' structured around traditional Greek rhetorical evidences proper to such a claim. The summarizing climax is reached in 2:15-21.

In contrast to a denial of human authorization for his apostleship Paul asserts a divine origin for his apostleship: ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead. This apostleship claim made here links Paul's rights as an apostle to preach the Gospel message which centers in the resurrection work of the Father in the life of Jesus Christ. It is this message that is also vigorously defended in the entire body proper over against the Judaizing tendency to compromise it as a mixture of traditional Judaism and Christian teaching.

The second specification of letter sender comes in verse two as καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοί, and all the brothers with me. This broad, inclusive reference does not give names of specific individuals. The possible identification of who is included in this reference depends entirely on where Paul was and at what point in time the letter was composed. Largely it remains a mystery. The term οἱ...ἀδελφοί can designate spiritual brothers in a general manner as well as probably functioning here as a designation of close associates present with Paul at the time of the writing of the letter. The only associates mentioned by name in the letter body are Barnabas and Titus (2:1-4). But they are mentioned only in reference to an event that happened many years prior to the writing of the letter. Because of the tone of the letter, no specific mention of associates is made in the letter Conclusio which does not contain the usual Greetings section.

The reason for Paul adding this very generalized additional specification of letter senders most likely was to affirm that the strong stance taken in the letter was shared by a group of fellow Christians with Paul at the time of the composition of the letter. It was not just one man's opinion, but instead a collective opinion

of those committed to the apostolic Gospel. Thus the sometimes exceedingly blunt language in the letter reflected a group view point of criticism of the Galatians. With this letter being composed in and read by individuals functioning in a collective society rather than an individualistic society, such group uniformity of view point took on a level of validation not typical in an individualistic society.

Adscriptio, v. 2b. Another signal of the impending harshness of this letter comes with the unusually short specification of the recipients of the letter: ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας, [to the churches of Galatia](#). Of the [thirteen Pauline letters](#) and especially of the nine addressed to churches, this is the most abrupt and curt Adscriptio of all. I strongly suspect that when this letter was read to the various house church groups in the cities of the province of Galatia that this did not escape their attention. It is clearly a minimalist Adscriptio with just enough information to identify generally those to whom the letter was written.

One of the huge controversies in modern times arises over the proper understanding of the term τῆς Γαλατίας, [of Galatia](#).⁴¹ The term Γαλατία in first century

⁴¹Γαλατία, ας, ἡ (Diocles 125; Appian, Mithr. 17 §60; 65 §272 al.; Cass. Dio 53, 26; ins) Galatia, a district in Asia Minor, abode of the Celtic Galatians, and a Roman province to which, in addition to the orig. Galatia, Isauria, Cilicia, and northern Lycaonia belonged. The exact mng. of G. in the NT, esp. in Paul, is a much disputed question. **Gal 1:2; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Ti 4:10** (in this pass. some mss. have Γαλλίαν, and even the better attested rdg. Γαλατίαν can be understood as referring to Gaul: Diod S 5, 22, 4 al.; Appian, Celts 1, 5 al.; Polyaenus 8, 23, 2; Jos., Ant. 17, 344; other ref. in Zahn, Einl. I 418.—To avoid confusion, it was possible to say something like Γαλατία τῆς ἔωας=eastern [Appian, Bell. Civ. 2, 49 §202] or Γαλάται οι ἐν Ασίᾳ [Appian, Bell. Civ. 4, 88 §373]; **1 Pt 1:1.** *For the NT there are only two possibilities, both of which involve the Galatia in Asia Minor.* The view that G. means the district orig. inhabited by the Galatians (North Gal. theory) found favor with Mommsen (ZNW 2, 1901, 86), ASteinmann (esp. detailed, D. Leserkreis des Gal. 1908), vDobschütz, Jülicher, MDibelius, Feine, Ltzm., JMoffatt, Goguel, Sickenberger, Lagrange, Meinertz, Oepke, EHänenchen (comm. on Ac 16:6), et al. Impressive support is given this point of view by Memnon of Asia Minor, a younger contemporary of Paul. For him the Galatians, of whom he speaks again and again (no. 434 Fgm. 1, 11ff Jac.), are the people with a well-defined individuality, who came to Asia Minor from Europe. Paul would never have addressed the Lycaonians as Γαλάται.—The opp. view, that G. means the Rom. province (South Gal. theory), is adopted by Zahn, Ramsay, FMever, FBurton (Gal 1921). GDuncan (Gal '34), esp. VWeber (Des Pls Reiserouten 1920). S. also FStähelin, Gesch. d. kleinasiat. Galater2 1907; RSyme, Galatia and Pamphylia under Aug.: Klio 27, '34, 122–48; CWatkins, D. Kampf des Pls um Galatien 1913; JRopes, The Singular Prob. of the Ep. to the Gal.

Greek can refer to two somewhat different regions in what is now central Turkey.⁴² In the usage inside the NT, the reference in First Peter 1:1 is clearly the broader provincial meaning of the term. The Acts 16:6 ἣν Φρυγίαν καὶ Γαλατικήν χώραν, region of Phrygia and Galatia, seemingly favors the ethnic meaning of northern Galatians, but this is the use of the adjective rather than the geographical noun. The same construction, τὴν Γαλατικήν χώραν καὶ Φρυγίαν, appears a second time in Acts 18:23 but this time the adjective clearly favors the provincial understanding, rather than the ethnic designation. The construction ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας, [to the churches of Galatia](#), in 1 Cor. 16:1 clearly favors the provincial meaning of the noun. But the construction Κρήσκης εἰς Γαλατίαν, [Crescens to Galatia](#), is too vague to know for certain.

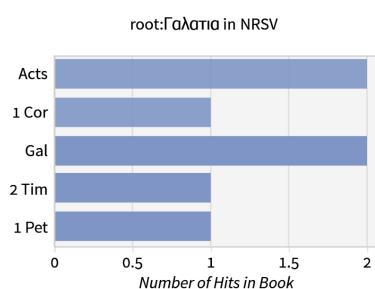
One major problem with understanding Γαλατία as an ethnic term referring to a group of people living in the northern part of the Roman province of Galatia is that no mention is made either by Luke or Paul of any evangelizing activity among this group of people. But for this letter to be addressed to Christians among them, a huge assumption has to be made that such activity by Paul took place without any clear evidential basis. On the other hand, when Γαλατία is taken as a reference to the Roman province by that name, it clearly references the churches established by Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey.

The understood meaning of Γαλατία has substantial implications for the time of the writing of this letter. If the provincial meaning is adopted then this letter comes either after the first missionary journey of Paul when he and Barnabas arrived back at Antioch. Or, as I am convinced, soon after he and Silas revisit these churches on the beginning let of the second missionary journey and after they arrived in Macedonia. But if the ethnic meaning is adopted, the writing of this letter is pushed back to the third missionary journey once 1929; LWeisgerber, Galat. Sprachreste: JGeffcken Festschr. '31, 151–75; Hemer, Acts 277–307 (North-Gal. hypothesis ‘unnecessary and improbable’ p. 306) Pauly-W. VII 519–55; Kl. Pauly II, 666–70.—New Docs 4, 138f. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 186–187.]

⁴²Γαλατία (4x) is part of a word group in the NT that includes the adjective Γαλατικός, -ή, -όν (pertaining to Galatia; 2x) and the personal noun Γαλάτης, ου, ὁ, Galatian (1x). Γαλατικός, -ή, -όν is used twice by Luke in Acts 16:6 and 18:23 most likely in reference to the district of ethnic Galatia in the north. The personal noun Γαλάτης, is used by Paul once in Gal. 3:1 referring to the inhabitants of Galatia which depends upon the specific meaning of the geographical noun Γαλατία.

As the chart on the right indicates Γαλατία is scattered across Paul's letters and Acts.



Paul arrived in Ephesus. The three possible dates for the letter composition then are in the late 40s; in the early 50s; and in the middle 50s. Each of these three scenarios presents somewhat different circumstances motivating the writing of the letter.

In the history of interpretation of the letter, the last scenario was the dominating viewpoint until the nineteenth century.⁴³ But for the past century plus a large number of biblical scholars, more recently mostly evangelical in orientation, have championed the provincial understanding of Γαλατία and identified the letter as being addressed to the churches established on the first missionary journey of Paul.⁴⁴ For good or ill, in today's

⁴³⁴⁴ Up till the nineteenth century, the view that Paul wrote to the churches of North Galatia held sway. This North Galatian hypothesis, given its classic expression by J. B. Lightfoot in that century and subsequently forcefully stated by James Moffatt,³ is still championed by many scholars today, predominantly but not exclusively in Germany.⁴ The South Galatian hypothesis, first laid on a firm archaeological foundation by W. M. Ramsay, who based his arguments for the case on the facts of historical geography,⁵ is followed by the majority of modern interpreters—at least as far as the English-speaking world is concerned.⁶ We will not rehearse in detail here the arguments which have been used in the debate,⁷ but only mention three considerations in support of the South Galatian hypothesis which commend themselves to us as particularly cogent: (a) what is known of the geographical situation at the time: none of the main roads in Asia Minor even passed through North Galatia, so that had Paul wanted to go to preach the gospel there he would not have set out from Lystra (cf. Acts 16:1, 6);⁸ (b) Paul's evangelistic strategy: it is obvious from Acts that Paul consistently concentrated his efforts on the main roads and centers of communication in the Roman Empire, and until the end of the third century South Galatia was more important than North Galatia and correspondingly more developed;⁹ (c) the silence of Acts regarding the establishment of churches in North Galatia: this silence, over against the author's explicit mention of churches in South Galatia, would be extremely difficult to explain if the controversy reflected in Galatians had been a controversy with the churches in North Galatia.¹⁰ [Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 1–3.]

⁴⁴⁴⁴ The South-Galatian view was first proposed by J. J. Schmidt, rector of Ilfeld, whom J. D. Michaelis combated in his *Einleitung*, 1788. (See Zahn, *Einleit.2 I 130*, E. T. p. 183, but for 1199 read 1788); then advocated more at length by Mynster in *Einleitung in den Brief an die Galater* in his *Kleinere Schriften*, 1825; by Böttger, *Beiträge*, 1837; and Thiersch, *Die Kirche im apostolischen Zeitalter*, 18521, 18793. It received fresh attention when Perrot advocated it in his *De Galatia Provincia Romana*, 1867, and since his day has been defended by Renan, St. Paul, 1869, and various later editions; Hausrath, *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte*; by Ramsay, who has written voluminously in its defence (*Church in the Roman Empire*, 18931, 18954; *Studia Biblia et Ecclesiastica*, vol. IV, 1896; *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, 1900, and various essays, especially in *The Expositor*); Rendall, in *The Expositor*, Ser. IV, vol. IX; Gifford, in *The Expositor*, Ser. IV, vol. X; Clemen, "Die Adressaten des Galaterbriefs," in *ZwTh. XXXVII* 396–423; also Paulus, vol. I, 1904; McGiffert, *Apostolic Age*, 1897; Askwith, *The Epistle to the Galatians: Its Destination and Date*, 1899; Bartlet, *Apostolic Age*, 1899; J. Weiss, art. "Kleinasiens," in PRE.

world, the issue tends to fall on evangelicals adopting the provincial meaning while most every else adopts the ethnic meaning.

Some of the arguments for the ethnic meaning are among the most convoluted phantasy expressions I have ever come across. Wild imagination runs rampant here. But the provincial meaning is not without problems either. The dominant 'South Galatian' hypothesis faces insurmountable barriers in trying to link the Jerusalem visit of Gal. 2:1–10 with the Acts 'famine' visit in 11:27–30, rather than with the quite obvious linkage with the Jerusalem council meeting of 15:1–29. While not as 'imaginative' as the arguments of the North Galatian hypothesis, they none the less are just as unconvincing.

Gerhard Vos years ago in the NIC Galatians volume in the first series proposed a middle ground and made quite convincing arguments in favor of it. These persuaded me then and have continued to do so for well over forty years. Most of the barriers to either of the above viewpoints are resolved by understanding that the letter was written to the churches of the first missionary journey after Paul and Silas had revisited these churches on the beginning of the second missionary journey in the early 50s. The objections to one another by the advocates of both in the above two views dissolve both completely and legitimately with this alternative proposal. Thus [volume 12](#) of the BIC commentary will be exegeted assuming the scenario of the second missionary journey.

Salutatio, vv. 3–5. Both in the Superscriptio and Salutatio expansion elements signal impending themes in the letter body. The rather standard Pauline version of greetings is given at the beginning: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ*. As described in the above [Introduction](#), this 'twin' greeting of χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη, *grace to you and peace*, represents both a 'Christianized' Greek and Jewish 'hello' in terms of normative patterns in the first century both verbally and in written letter form. The intent of such a Greeting was to take a friendly stance toward the recipients by the sender(s) of the letter.

Here again the expansion elements immediately shift away from the recipients to a fundamental belief declaration that builds off the expansion elements in the

vol. X; Bacon, *Introd. to N. T.* 1900; Woodhouse in *Encyc. Bib.* vol. II, col. 1592 ff.; Zahn, *Einleitung2*, 1900, E. T., 19091, 19172; Kommentar, 1905; Lake, *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*, 1911; Emmet, in *The Readers' Commentary*, 1912." [Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1920), xxiv.]

Superscriptio section. This core declaration is in verse four: τοῦ δόντος ἔαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἔξεληται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πνονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, of Him who gave Himself up for our sins, so that He might Himself rescue us from this present evil age⁴⁵ according to the will of God even our Father. Thus the resurrection of Christ produced by the Heavenly Father (v. 1) confirms the self-sacrifice of Christ as the divine Resuer of humanity from the clutches of evil.

In Paul's vigorous defense of the Gospel that God called him to proclaim as an apostle the pivotal events of resurrection (v.1) and crucifixion with this stated objective (v.4) stands as the foundation of that message. This was in danger of being corrupted by the false teaching of the Judaizers, and thus produced this vigorous rebuttal from Paul. Drawing heavily upon conceptualizations from apocalyptic Judaism of two ages of human history, the apostle frames the spiritual consequences of Jesus' death on the cross as a rescue of humanity from the clutches of Satan in this present evil age. The ἡμᾶς, us, in his statement ἔξεληται ἡμᾶς specifically id's those rescued as believers in Christ. The close connection between Christ and the Heavenly Father is once again affirmed with the contention that this self-sacrifice based rescue is κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, according to the will of God even our Father.

Thus with this heavily theological Salutatio the apostle greets the members of the churches across the Galatian province. His concern centers on proper understanding of the apostolic Gospel and he lets the readers know this through the expansion elements in both the Superscriptio and Salutatio.

9.1.2 Proem

6 Θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι [Χριστοῦ] εἰς ἔτερον εὐαγγέλιον, 7 ὁ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο, εἰ μή τινές εἰσιν οἱ ταράσσοντες ὑμᾶς καὶ θέλοντες μεταστρέψαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ. 8 ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔαν ἡμεῖς ἡ ἄγγελος ἔξούρανοῦ εὐαγγελίζηται [ὑμῖν] παρ' ὁ εὐηγγελισάμεθα

⁴⁵Just as accurate translation of ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πνονηροῦ is from this present age of the Evil One. The Greek text statement covers both ideas but none of the modern western languages has a single expression that can cover both these ideas. Thus each translation committee or translator is forced into choosing which one to use for the Greek expression. Therefore one reads both expressions in modern translations.

The choice is not between which one is correct, but which one is chosen since both can't be used. Some translations will put the other option in a footnote marking the range of meanings. But these must not be read as either/or options, since both ideas are incorporated into the single Greek expression. The problem is with modern western limitations on thought patterns. That is our problem, but wasn't Paul's since he faced no such dilemma.

ὑμῖν, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω. 9 ὡς προειρήκαμεν καὶ ἄρτι πάλιν λέγω· εἴ τις ὑμᾶς εὐαγγελίζεται παρ' ὁ παρελάβετε, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω.

10 Ἀρτι γὰρ ἀνθρώπους πείθω ἡ τὸν θεόν; Ἡ ζητῶ ἀνθρώποις ἀρέσκειν; εἰ ἔτι ἀνθρώποις ἥρεσκον, Χριστοῦ δοῦλος οὐκ ἂν ἥμην.

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!

10 Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

What we have here is not the standard Εύχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν μνείαν ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, We give thanks to God always in every remembrance of you in our prayers... (1 Thess. 1:2). Instead comes Θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι [Χριστοῦ] εἰς ἔτερον εὐαγγέλιον, I am astounded that you are so quickly thusly turning from the One who called you in the grace of Christ into another gospel.... This obviously is not the usual prayer of thanksgiving found in the vast majority of Paul's letters.

What is this then? In ancient Greek rhetorical patterns, especially for a speech of persuasion, the orator or writer would begin with an Exordium which stated the thesis being argued in the speech.⁴⁶ As we will discover below, the structural arrangement of the letter body follows closely many of the basic elements in a speech of persuasion in ancient Greece.

Thus what Paul signals here in unusually strong language is his displeasure with some developing trends taking place in the Galatian churches.

The heart of his displeasure is stated in οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι [Χριστοῦ] εἰς ἔτερον εὐαγγέλιον, in such a manner you are quickly turning away from the One who called you in the grace of Christ into another gospel. These churches were coming under a corrupting influence that pushed them into rejecting the apostolic Gospel presented to them by Paul in their beginning. It was being replaced

⁴⁶The Latin noun *exordium* comes from the verb *exordiri* meaning 'to begin.' The Greek equivalent in oratory was *προοίμιον*, *prooimion*, or *proem* with a meaning close to the English words Preface or Introduction. One should note that the Greek epistolary use of the term narrowed the definition down to an open health wise prayer. .

by another gospel message that Paul labels ἔτερον εὐαγγέλιον, *another gospel*, and then quickly defines as ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο, *which is not another*. His clever play on these two pronouns *for another* carries a meaning almost impossible to translate into English. The ἔτερον εὐαγγέλιον of these false teachers was a totally different message completely incompatible with the apostolic Gospel alluded to in the Superscriptio and Salutatio. This is the point of the relative modifying clause ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο that literally means *which is not another version* of the apostolic Gospel. That is, the Galatian Christians were being pushed into a non-existing gospel under false guise of it being the true gospel.

Further amplification of Paul's point comes with the exceptive negative clause εἰ μή τινές εἰσιν οἱ ταράσσοντες ὑμᾶς καὶ θέλοντες μεταστρέψαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *except that certain ones are those troubling you and desiring to pervert the Gospel of Christ*. No names are mentioned here but what these teachers were essentially attempting to do is laid out very clearly, and this will be expanded several times in the letter body.

The impossibility of legitimately making such a change in the apostolic Gospel is then presented by two hypothetical statements in verses eight and nine. The concessive statement in verse eight sets up a highly unlikely scenario of either Paul or a heavenly angel preaching such a different message to the Galatians. Should such happen both he and the angel would deserved to be banished to Hell for eternity!

The second first class conditional sentence in verse nine assumes that individuals are trying to evangelize the Galatians with this different non-gospel. And they also deserve banishment to eternal damnation for such actions. The repeated ἀνάθεμα ἔστω, *let him be anathema*, as the apodosis main clause of both statements, is the strongest language that Paul could use to express his displeasure with these false teachers.

He quickly moves in verse ten to distance himself from these false teachers as much as possible. Through a pair of rhetorical questions⁴⁷ and a second class conditional statement⁴⁸ he affirms passionately his legitimate role as Christ's servant speaking the true message from God to the Galatians.

With the laying out of his 'agenda' in the Exordium in 1:6-10, Paul has given his readers a clear signal of what this letter is about. They have been alerted to the

⁴⁷The rhetorical questions in their open ended structuring set up the contrary to fact statement that follows. The Galatians knew well that Paul's passion was God's will and total adherence to it no matter what the response of his audience.

This structuring of his 'thesis' in the Exordium will open the door for a vigorous defense of his apostleship along with his apostolic message.

⁴⁸A contrary to fact type sententia that affirms the opposite of what is stated in exceedingly strong terms.

very heart of the apostolic Gospel in the Superscriptio and Salutatio expansion elements. Now Paul's stance toward the Galatians is spelled out very clearly in the Exordium. The Galatians are being pushed to abandon this gospel for a phony alternative that will spell spiritual disaster for them. The apostle's expressed intention is to argue the case for the apostolic Gospel through his proclamation of it as an apostle in the hopes of persuading the Galatians to not be intimidated into adopting the phony alternative being thrust upon them by the Judaizing teachers. Almost certain is that the Judaizers were claiming apostolic validity for their gospel which necessitated casting doubt on Paul's claim to apostleship as the foundation for his Gospel.

9.1.3 Letter Body

From the later part of the past century, biblical scholars have increasingly recognized the important and insightful analysis of Hans Dieter Betz in the volume on Galatians in the Hermeneia commentary series.⁴⁹ Although most have moved beyond Betz in refinements and revisions, he began the conversation about the arrangement of the contents of Galatians for contemporary analysis. Galatians, as has become clear to those who work with ancient materials closely, is arranged very rhetorically around the principles of a 'letter of friendship' pattern in the first century world.

The implications of this for exegesis is to provide clearly defined labels for the obvious units of text material for the letter body. These are as follows:

Narratio,	1:11-2:21
Probatio,	3:1-4:31
Exhortio,	5:1-6:10

Inside each of these units of text the strategy of idea presentation follows either a dominantly Greek orientation or a scribal Jewish orientation, and sometimes a mixture of both. In appealing to the Galatians to remain true to the apostolic Gospel, the apostle reaches deeply into his dual heritage as a Diaspora Jew and utilizes every possible strategy to make his case for the Gospel. Interestingly where the emphasis is countering the Judaizing message more directly, especially in the Probatio, Paul's strategy is more scribal Jewish like a Pharisee would argue. The other sections reflect a more Greek way of thinking.

Narratio, 1:11-2:21. In this section, Paul moves to establishing the divine nature of his calling as an apostle. In 1:11-12, he affirms the implications of the expansion elements in the Superscriptio and Salutatio

⁴⁹For a more comprehensive analysis see my article in the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* titled "A Rhetorical Reading of Galatians." I heavily quote from this article in the material of this study. A digital copy is available online at <http://cranfordville.com/Cranfordville/GalRead.pdf>.

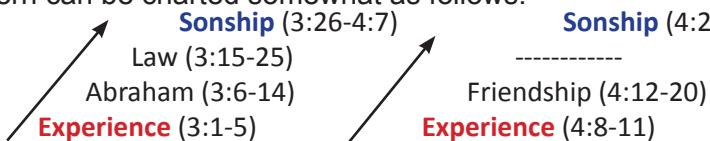
with the contention of the divine origin of the Gospel that he preaches: τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ εὐαγγελισθὲν ὑπὸ ἔμοῦ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν κατὰ ἀνθρώπον· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐγὼ παρὰ ἀνθρώπου παρέλαβον αὐτὸν οὕτε ἐδιάχθην, ἀλλὰ δι’ ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, the Gospel which is proclaimed by me that it is not according to man, for I neither received it nor was taught it by a man, rather through revelatory disclosure from Jesus Christ.

This becomes the foundational stance that Paul now sets out to prove through a set of historical evidences:

- a) His conversion and calling, 1:13-17.
- b) His first visit to Jerusalem as a Christian, 1:18-19.
- c) His subsequent relationship with the churches of Judea, 1:20-24.
- d) His participation in the Jerusalem council, 2:1-10.
- e) His rebuke of Peter's hypocrisy at Antioch, 2:11-14.

He brings these evidences to a climatic summation in 1:15-21. Very creatively he carefully transitions from the rebuke of Peter in 2:11-14 into his summation with vv. 15-17 and reaches the summation in vv. 18-21. The zenith of this summary is the well known declaration in vv. 19b-20, Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι· 20 ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῇ δὲ ἐν ἔμοι Χριστός· ὃ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκὶ, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἔμοῦ, *With Christ I stand crucified; and I live no longer, but in me lives Christ, and what I now live in the flesh I live in faith commitment to the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.* This statement perhaps more than any other statement of Paul helped trigger the Protestant Reformation. The Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, in teaching this text to students could not get away from its haunting indictment of his dependence upon works of penance etc. for his salvation. God used Paul's statements here to turn his life around in a spiritual revolution that eventually changed not only Europe but the western world itself.

Probatio, 3:1-4:31. The Narratio looked to personal historical events in Paul's life as evidence of the divine origin of his message and calling to proclaim it. The Probatio shifts to more ideological arguments for evidence of the divine origin of his calling as an apostle and especially the Gospel message God commissioned him to preach as an apostle. Here some Greek rhetorical patterns help give structure, but most of his arguments have a very scribal Jewish orientation. Paul's strategy begins with experience (3:1-5) and moves toward a climatic assertion of sonship on the basis of experience (3:26-4:7). Again he starts with experience (4:8-11) and moves toward the sonship assertion (4:21-31) The pattern can be charted somewhat as follows:



What is meant by the label "experience"? In both 3:1-5 and 4:8-11 the apostle challenged the Galatians to recall their initial conversion experience as pivotal to where they now are spiritually. In 3:1-5, through a series of probing rhetorical questions he reminded them of the faith basis of their beginning experience in the Gospel. The alternative "hearing leading to faith" was pitted against "works of Law." Their initial experience was the former, not the latter now being argued by the trouble-makers in Galatia. That faith commitment had effectively brought them as far as they had progressed spiritually. Why now should they change boats in mid-stream?

Similarly in 4:8-11, Paul reminded them of the powerful transformation from paganism to Christianity that characterized that initial experience. Their present inclination to return to τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα, the weak and beggarly elements (4:8), made present adherence to the Law a reversion to their past paganism. Thus in both sections Paul attempted to demonstrate that the present demands to conform to Torah stood in hypocritical contradiction to the way they had begun their spiritual pilgrimage in the Gospel. If they would only think about beginnings, they would find insight for present directions!

In 3:6-9, the linkage of the Christian community to Abraham is set forth on the basis of a common faith experience. This was foreseen and established in the OT scriptures. Faith became the connection, not Law, as is set forth emphatically (1) in 3:10 - 14 where being ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, in work of law, means condemnation and (2) in 3:15 - 18 where the 430 years later given Law in no way changes the covenant promise made to Abraham and his descendants, the children of faith. Here Paul evidently is taking on some of the central arguments of the trouble-makers. With the OT itself he proves the impossibility of their stance and the correctness of his linkage of believers -- Jewish and Gentile -- with Abraham.

This leads to the crucial question in 3:19, Τί οὖν ὁ νόμος; *Why then the Law?* Before climaxing his point of faith and Abraham, this question of the value of the Law must be addressed. Via the graphic imagery of prison and παιδαγωγὸς, he asserts its fundamental role was to prepare the way for faith in Christ. If the modern reader jumps from 3:18 to 3:26 the continuity of thought-flow will be seen bringing the issue set forth in 3:1-5 to its climax. 3:19-25 is important, but only as a side issue to prevent a charge against Paul as having absolutely rejected the revelation of God to Moses. The Sinaitic Code was significant, but not a means of salvation. Thus in 3:26-4:7, Paul emphatically asserts regarding the Gentile Galatians: εἰ δὲ ὑμεῖς

Χριστοῦ, ἄρα τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ σπέρμα ἔστε, κατ' ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι, *And since you indeed are Christ's, then Abraham's seed you are, according to promise, heirs* (3:29). The Roman aristocratic household with slaves and sons provides the reinforcing imagery of this sonship in 4:1-7. The Galatians' initial faith commitment legitimately linked these Gentiles to the divine covenant with Abraham and assures them of being in good standing with God. To interject the legalism of Law into the picture only messes things up; that the Galatians should consider when feeling pressure from the trouble makers!

Paul hurls a second missile at the Galatians from the launchpad of experience in 4:8-11. The appeal to conversion experience here concludes with Paul's pressing their relationship with him both then and now. Throughout the letter he has appealed to the sensitivities of the Galatians by pushing them away and pulling them toward him.⁵⁰ Here marks the turning point from pushing them away to pulling them back. His fussing at them now shifts into images of confidence and warmth. A father wisely uses bonds of relationship with his children to encourage them to do what is right!

This provides the basis for Paul's lengthy appeal to friendship in 4:12-20. A triangle of relations is set up: Galatians to Paul; Paul to Galatians; Galatians to trouble makers; trouble makers to Galatians; Paul to trouble makers. By reminding the Galatians of their fervent love for him initially he presses them to renew that warmth now. The trouble makers are 'courting' the Galatians (4:17) but with improper motives. Thus the Galatians should reject their advances. Paul is the affectionate one with proper motive; in fact, his affections are more than a 'suitor's', they are those of a mother giving birth. The Galatians will hopefully recognize who genuinely cares for them. A lesson modern readers should heed in relating to spiritual leaders today!

Paul moves again to the sonship issue in 4:21-31. The same route of connection to Abraham as the means to sonship is asserted. This time, though, Paul employs a peculiar method of argumentation to the modern reader, an allegory.⁵¹ The sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac along with their mothers, provide the typological pattern for Paul's emphasis. By an untraditional association of the synagogue tradition with Hagar and Ishmael and the Christian community with Sarah and Isaac the theme of sonship via divine promise is linked to believers -- an assertion made before in

50 |==> "I am shocked that you..." (1:6); |==< "O stupid Galatians, who has bewitched you... (3:1); |==> "I'm afraid I've wasted my time messing with you" (4:11); <==| "My children, whom again I suffer the pains of birth over... (4:19-20); <==| "You were running well" (5:7); <==| "I am persuaded of you in the Lord that you won't be otherwise minded" (5:10).

⁵¹In modern literary terms, the label typology is more accurate than allegory. The Greek word for allegory (4:24) was broad enough to carry this meaning.

3:26-4:7 In the second emphasis here Paul uses this motif to prepare the way for the third major section of the body proper, 5:1-6:10. Sonship means freedom, versus slavery through the demands of the Law.

To a large extent in the Probatio section, Paul turns the argument of his Judaizing opponents on its head and demonstrates through using most likely many of their argument strategies that just the opposite of their phony message is the Gospel message that he preaches.

Exhortio, 5:1-6:10. The structure of Paul's approach is as follows: the axiom of freedom in Christ with a positive/negative admonition to stand in this freedom. This foundation is then expanded and developed in three subdivisions (5:1,2-12; 5:13,14-24; 5:25,266:10) that build on each other while advancing the idea of freedom. Notice the beginning structure for each section. The axiom / admonitions introduction sets the tone for each of the sections which largely is an elaboration of this beginning structure. Here Paul's own creativity shines forth.

(1) 5:1

**Τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἡλευθέρωσεν αἱον
στήκετε οὖν καὶ** admonition +

μὴ πε

(2) 5:13 Υμεῖς γὰρ ἐπ' ἑλευθερίᾳ ἐκλήθητε axiom
ἀδελφοί μόνον μὴ τὴν ἑλευθερίαν εἰς ἀφορμὴν τῇ σαρκὶ, admonition -
ἀλλὰ

(3) E-25

(3) 3:25 Εἰ ζῶμεν πνεύματι,
πνεύματι καὶ στοιχῶμεν
axiom
admonition +

In the first subdivision (5:1-12), Paul applies this axiom/admonition structure to the issue of circumcision and Law obedience. In strong language, he presents the Galatians with the option: either Law or grace (5:2-6). They must decide on one or the other; the option of the trouble makers of both Law and grace is rejected as false. In 5:7-12, he appeals to them to choose grace by expressing confidence in their past track record and for the future, He comes down extremely hard on the trouble makers as the cause of the problem with the Galatians. Thus the seriousness of the issue of the non-gospel by the troublemakers is underscored. It's decision time for the Galatians! Freedom involves responsibility. The Galatians must take their stand.

In the second subdivision (5:13-24), Paul advances

es the issue of freedom to deal with the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian behavior. Freedom is no license to sin; rather, it is the base of loving service to others. Verses fourteen and fifteen enlarge upon the negative/positive admonitions in verse thirteen in an a/b // b'/a' sequence.⁵² 5:16-24 provides the source for the difference between responsible and irresponsible use of freedom: the Holy Spirit. The role of the Spirit has frequently surfaced already in the letter in both salvation and Christian living,⁵³ but now is more fully expressed as the decisive force in overcoming the power of the flesh. Here is precisely why there was so much at stake with the Galatians. To have chosen Law over grace would have cut them off from the Spirit of Christ who alone can make the difference between success and failure in coping with fleshly desires. This emphasis reaches a high point in 5:24: “**Those belonging to Christ have crucified the flesh together with its passions and cravings.**”

In the third subdivision (5:25-6:10), Paul develops further the ethical implications of this freedom in Christ that unleashes the power of the Spirit in the believer. On the premise that we owe our spiritual life (both conversion and daily living) to the Spirit (5:25a), we are admonished to “**get in step**” (στοιχῶμεν) with the Spirit, i.e., walk in harmony with his leadership (5:25b). This has profound implications for the believer, both inwardly (attitude) and outwardly (actions).⁵⁴ Failure, (5:26) attitudinal (“**vainglory**”), goes hand in glove with wrong actions (“**provoking one another, envying one another**”). Positively, helpful ministry to the wayward brother depends on keeping careful focus on one’s own vulnerability (6:1). Also, supportive ministry in carrying burdens depends on proper spiritual self-perception (6:2-5). Sharing with spiritual leaders stands as another implication of following the Spirit’s leadership (6:6). Spiritual insight into the principle of sowing and reaping wraps up this section (6:7-10), again encompassing both inward spiritual perceptiveness and outward actions of good deeds toward others.

The letter body stands as a beautiful example of how a Diaspora Jew can utilize his twin heritage in both Greco-Roman culture and Jewish religious heritage to make a powerful argument for the apostolic Gospel. It is a wholistic approach that touches on his readers

⁵²Interestingly, Paul uses graphic language in the a/a' sequence: flesh//biting and gnawing on one another. In the b/b' section he sets forth the admonition to serve (b), then supports it with a scripture proof (b'). Thus, irresponsible use of freedom turns into the destruction of relationships; whereas responsible use leads to sacrificial service building up relationships.

⁵³Cf. 3:2,3,5,14; 4:6,29; 5:5.

⁵⁴An alternative way of classifying Paul’s thought structure here is self-esteem and stance toward others. A positive self-esteem goes with edifying ministry toward others; a negative self-esteem leads to destructive actions toward others.

experience, on their ways of thinking both as Jewish and non-Jewish Christians, shows his clever exposure of the falseness of many of his opponents’ arguments in order to undermine the credibility of their position et als. The letter body is driven by intense passion from Paul not just for the apostolic Gospel but for the integrity of the faith commitment of his Galatian readers. His personal investment in them was substantial as Luke’s description in Acts 13 - 14 depicts. He did not want to see them led astray by these false teachers. They had given him Timothy from Lystra and would provide other leaders later on who labored faithfully along side Paul.

9.1.4 Conclusio

By the time of the emperor Augustus with the ancient letter, the conclusion section normally contained two or three elements: health wish for recipients; word of farewell, e.g., “*Eppωσθε* in Acts 15:29; a closing greeting preceding the first two. Paul expanded the pattern in this section more than anywhere else in the letter format with benedictions and/or doxologies replacing the health wish and other elements.

In Galatians one finds an autographic postscript (cf. 6:11 which served to authenticate the contents of the letter actually written by an amanuensis. As part of this verifying process, the central issues of the letter were summarized by Paul in his own handwriting (6:12-16) with verse sixteen reaching a climax through the pronouncement of blessing upon all the Galatians who adopt the position Paul has advocated. Verse seventeen reasserts Paul’s own genuineness as a spokesman for the Lord -- a major issue in the letter.

Then verse eighteen contains the benediction typical in the Pauline letters, although some unique elements are present. Most interestingly, ἀδελφοί, found only in this Pauline benediction, concludes the letter with a touch of warmth and affection. The liturgical ἀμήν became the congregational affirmative response to the public reading of this letter.

One of the ongoing inquiries into Galatians concerns **the identification of the false teachers** who stood behind this alternative message that Paul attacks.

First a profile of these individuals from within Galatians. In the Exordium (1:6-10) and the Sender Verification (6:11-16) we find more detail. In the letter body only scattered references surface.

1:7, τινές εἰσιν οἱ ταράσσοντες ὑμᾶς καὶ θέλοντες μεταστρέψαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *certain ones are those troubling you and wishing to pervert the Gospel of Christ.*

1:9, εἴ τις ὑμᾶς εὐαγγελίζεται παρ’ ὁ παρελάβετε,

if anyone proclaims a message to you beyond what you received.

1:11-12. The strong implication in Paul's affirmation of the divine origin of his Gospel message is that the alternative from these false teachers had a purely human origin.

1:13-17. He claim of independency from both Peter and the Twelve in Jerusalem carries strong implications of the false teachers claiming an apostolic endorsement of their message from the leaders in Jerusalem.

2:4-5. διὰ δὲ τοὺς παρεισάκτους ψευδαδέλφους, οἵτινες παρεισῆλθον κατασκοπῆσαι τὴν ἔλευθερίαν ἡμῶν ἦν ἔχομεν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα ἡμᾶς καταδουλώσουσιν, 5 οἵς οὐδὲ πρὸς ὅραν εἴξαμεν τῇ ὑποταγῇ, ἵνα ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου διαμείνῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς, *But because of the secretly slipped in false brothers who wormed their way in so that they could spy out the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, in order to re-enslave us, to who not for a moment did we yield in submission so that the truth of the Gospel might be preserved for you.* This depiction corresponds to Luke's references: Καὶ τινες κατελθόντες ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἐδίδασκον τοὺς ἀδελφούς ὅτι, ἐὰν μὴ περιτμηθῆτε τῷ ἔθει τῷ Μωϋσέως, οὐ δύνασθε σωθῆναι, and after certain ones came down from Judea they began teaching the brothers that unless you are circumcised by the custom of Moses you cannot be saved (15:1) and Ἐξανέστησαν δέ τινες τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς αἱρέσεως τῶν Φαρισαίων πεπιστευκότες λέγοντες ὅτι δεῖ περιτέμνειν αὐτοὺς παραγγέλλειν τε τηρεῖν τὸν νόμον Μωϋσέως, *But there stood up in opposition certain ones from the sect of the Pharisees who were believers saying that it is divinely mandated to be circumcised and to obey the law of Moses for Gentile believers* (15:5). Even though both Gal 2:1-10 and Acts 15 is describing an earlier event in which this viewpoint was soundly defeated by the decision of the Twelve and of the Jerusalem church leadership, it seems that some sort of connection with this opposition in Jerusalem to Paul exists with these false teachers now in Galatia within a couple of years of the Jerusalem agreement. The nature of that connection is vigorously debated, but the connection is usually affirmed.

2:11-14. The lasting impact on the church in Antioch of Peter's hypocritical actions of refusing table fellowship with non-Jewish Christians in the church clearly did not help the issue of maintaining a pure apostolic Gospel. This came sometime fairly soon after the Jerusalem conference agreement with the Twelve who under Peter's leadership affirmed Paul's Gospel apart from works of Law (cf. 2:7-10). Whether Peter's and Barnabas' caving into the demands to distance themselves as Jewish believers from Gentile believers at Antioch spurred on these false teachers is hard to say. Clearly it didn't help Paul with the Galatians.

3:1. Ὡς ἀνόητοι Γαλάται, τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβάσκανεν, οἵς κατ' ὄφθαλμοὺς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη ἐσταυρωμένος; *O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was paraded as the Crucified One?* With sarcastic tones, Paul taunts his readers as having been blinded by these false teachers functioning like witch doctors so that they could not see clearly the crucified Christ that Paul had earlier preached to them.

4:9-10. 9 νῦν δὲ γνόντες θεόν, μᾶλλον δὲ γνωσθέντες ὑπὸ θεοῦ, πῶς ἐπιστρέψετε πάλιν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχά στοιχεῖα οἵς πάλιν ἄνωθεν δουλεύειν θέλετε; 10 ἡμέρας παρατηρεῖσθε καὶ μῆνας καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἐνιαυτούς, *But now having known God, rather however, having been known by God, how can you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements to which again do you want to be re-enslaved? You observe days and months and times and years.* Here Paul alludes clearly to the spiritual disaster of turning to Torah obedience as required for salvation. He sees it as re-enslavement to the spiritual blindness of the paganism that many of the Galatians had come out of in their conversion to Christ. This represents the impact of this false message being taught among the churches.

4:17. ζηλοῦσιν ὑμᾶς οὐ καλῶς, ἀλλ' ἐκκλεῖσαι ὑμᾶς θέλουσιν, ἵνα αὐτοὺς ζηλοῦτε, *they court you improperly, rather they want to exclude you so that they can take control of you.* By using the rather rare example of men seeking a wife in that world, Paul underscores that their intention is not to bring the Galatians to Christ but instead to take possession of them for their own cause. This stands in stark contrast to Paul's motives for trying to influence the Galatians (cf. vv. 18-20).

5.7-8. 7 Ἐτρέχετε καλῶς· τίς ὑμᾶς ἐνέκοψεν [τῇ] ἀληθείᾳ μὴ πείθεσθαι; 8 ἡ πεισμονὴ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς. *You were running well; who has kept you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from the One who calls you.* With the athletic metaphor, Paul pictures these false teachers as having thrown up 'road blocks' across the spiritual path of the Galatians. And these barriers they used have no connection to God whatsoever.

5.10b. ὁ δὲ ταράσσων ὑμᾶς βαστάσει τὸ κρίμα, ὅστις ἔὰν ἦ. *The one troubling you will bear judgment, whoever he may be.* Paul asserts that all of the false teachers, no matter who he may be in the eyes of men, will face the wrath of God for their teaching.

5.11-12. 11 Ἐγὼ δέ, ἀδελφοί, εἰ περιτομὴν ἔτι κηρύσσω, τί ἔτι διώκομαι; ἄρα κατήργηται τὸ σκάνδαλον τοῦ σταυροῦ. 12 Ὁφελον καὶ ἀποκόφονται οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς. *And I brother, if I still were preaching circumcision, why then am I being persecuted? Oh that those upsetting you would castrate themselves!* Paul here alludes to a cowardice by the false teachers prompting

them to preach a message of circumcision in order to avoid facing persecution from the synagogues in the cities of Galatia. Luke describes on the first missionary journey how vicious the synagogue opposition to Paul and Barnabas was. These false teachers want to compromise the Gospel to lessen the person danger.

Then in verse twelve Paul blurts out the most blunt statement found in the NT. If in circumcision cutting a little flesh does some good, then why don't the teachers cut off the entire genital!

6:12-13. 12 Ὅσοι θέλουσιν εύπροσωπῆσαι ἐν σαρκὶ, οὗτοι ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι, μόνον ἵνα τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μὴ διώκωνται. 13 οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον φυλάσσουσιν ἄλλᾳ θέλουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι, ἵνα ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ σαρκὶ καυχήσωνται. *Those desiring to make a good showing in the flesh are the ones compelling you to be circumcised, for the sole reason that they may not be persecuted because of the cross of Christ. Now these having been circumcised do not themselves keep the Law, but they want you to be circumcised so they can boast about your flesh.* In this Sender Verification in the letter Conclusio, Paul in his own handwriting rather than that of the writing secretary summarizes what had been inferred about these false teachers up to this point. These teachers sought to soften the demands of the Gospel with a mixture of Judaism into their message. This would appease the local synagogues and allow Christianity to be in good standing with these synagogues. Paul's observations paint a group more interested in compromise than in maintaining the pure message of salvation by faith apart from works of Law. He attacks their motives as much as their compromised message.

What does not emerge from this is the personal identity of these individuals. He shifts back and forth between referencing single individuals and group designations. Thus trying to attach any names to these individuals is an utter waste of time. Yet, in the silence of scripture, men wax forth with eloquent nonsense!¹⁵

⁵⁵^cKirsopp Lake's suggestion that they were local Jews seeking to win the Galatians over as proselytes to Judaism² appears less natural, in view of the clear evidence of Judaizing activity at least as far as Antioch and Syria-Cilicia (Acts 15:1, 24), than the supposition that such activity extended to the churches of Galatia from elsewhere.³ It faces the further difficulty that Paul's opponents seem to have been Christians, whose 'gospel' bore some resemblance to the authentic gospel (1:6–7).⁴

J. H. Ropes, elaborating an earlier thesis put forth by Wilhelm Lütgert, maintains that Paul was battling on two fronts: on the one hand, Judaizers (not intruders from outside but local Gentile Christians who had yielded to the pressure of local synagogue Jews and were now themselves Judaizing) and, on the other hand, libertine radicals (also Gentile Christians) who wished to sever all association with Judaism.⁵ This view is open to the fatal objection that there is really no evidence that Paul had to wage war on a double front in Galatia;⁶ Ropes's major presupposition that the same gnosticizing tendency as was present in Corinth 'would naturally

present itself elsewhere' has also been called into question.⁷

"Johannes Munck argues that the opponents were some of Paul's own Gentile converts who, considering themselves insufficiently instructed by Paul, now wished to conform to the practice of the Jerusalem church.⁸ But while Paul addresses his own converts in the second person, the opponents are referred to throughout in the third person (a distinction most clearly seen, e.g., at 4:17); comparison with a similar approach in the Corinthian letters, where 'offenders within the church of Corinth are rebuked in the second person, while interlopers from elsewhere are denounced in the third person,' strongly suggests that in Galatians as well the agitators have come from outside.⁹

"Walther Schmithals's thesis that the Galatian heretics were Jewish Christian Gnostics¹⁰ has gained little acceptance among scholars — deservedly so, since it is based on several dubious assumptions. The objection has been raised, for instance, that the interpretation of the heretics' demand for circumcision as a means of securing release symbolically from the dominion of the flesh has no basis at all in the letter; the strong insistence on the law throughout the epistle indicates that the Galatian opponents were advocates of a Jewish legalism — which ill fits a Gnostic theory; certain tendencies which may be expected of Gnosticism (such as a thoroughgoing dualism) do not appear; and, unlike 1 Corinthians, gnōsis ("knowledge") plays no role in the letter.¹¹

"A similar attempt to identify the Galatian agitators as Jewish Christian syncretists who sought enlightenment through legal observance, including circumcision,¹² fails to satisfy, if only because it involves the unjustifiable procedure of reading the Colossian situation into Galatia and the unlikely conclusion that Paul must have himself adhered to some Jewish mystery-cult before his conversion.¹³

"Robert Jewett understands the Galatian agitators to be a politically-orientated group of nomistic Christians in Judea; his hypothesis is that

Jewish Christians in Judea were stimulated by Zealot pressure into a nomistic campaign among their fellow Christians in the late forties and early fifties. Their goal was to avert the suspicion that they were in common with lawless Gentiles. It appears that the Judean Christians convinced themselves that circumcision of Gentile Christians would thwart Zealot reprisals.

"It is in this light, Jewett believes, that Galatians 6:12–13 is to be interpreted.¹⁴ According to his theory, the agitators employed the tactic not of directly opposing Paul or his theology, but of offering a completion to it (3:3) through the way of circumcision (vv. 6–18); such an offer of perfection would exert a powerful attraction on the Hellenistic Christians of Galatia, who would be acquainted with it as the familiar aim alike of the mystery religions and of classical philosophy, and who, moreover, themselves had 'an intensely proud spiritual self-consciousness.'¹⁵

"Though favorably received by some scholars,¹⁶ Jewett's interpretation does not seem to be free from difficulties. The main difficulty is that the evidence in support of the claim that it was specifically Zealot pressure — as distinct from non-Christian Jewish pressure in general — which occasioned the nomistic campaign among the Gentile churches is neither substantial nor unequivocal. In view of the sharply antithetical relationship between the Zealot movement and the Christian Church at the outbreak of the Jewish War,¹⁷ it may be doubted if the Judean Christians did entertain the conviction earlier that a nomistic campaign among the Gentile Christians would thwart Zealot reprisals;¹⁸ the Zealots as a party¹⁹

What appears to me to be the only legitimate ‘modern’ question here is whether these teachers were local or outsiders. The profile of insider Galatians hints at both rather one over the other. Ultimately the issue is rather moot, because the same impact results regardless of their origin. The temptation to compromise the Gospel that brought uncircumcised Gentiles into the Christian community in order to get along with the Jewish synagogue community to which many of the Jewish Christians and many of the converted God-fearer Gentiles were attached was a powerful dynamic. It ‘legitimatized’ the Christian gospel in the eyes of men; it avoided the nasty hostility of the local Jews against the Christians; it made life much easier for the Christian community. With the beginning of severe tensions between the Jews and the Romans in the emergence of the Zealot movement in Palestine, it is not difficult to see how a ‘let’s get along with everyone’ attitude could be appealing.

The internal profile of these false teachers does not portray them as passionate ideologues blindly committed to a religious principle. Instead, Paul’s criticism portrays them more as opportunists wanting to avoid a hostile Jewish community’s wrath. Oddly, this angle doesn’t tend to receive much attention from modern scholars whose own contemporary approach is geared to getting along with everyone at nearly any cost.

What seems to be the case from a few very isolated later references is that this letter had most of Paul’s desired impact on the Galatian churches. Luke describes him returning through this region on the third missionary journey about a year or so later, enjoying a positive experience with the churches: Καὶ ποιήσας χρόνον τινὰ ἔξηλθεν διερχόμενος καθεξῆς τὴν Γαλατικὴν χώραν καὶ Φρυγίαν, ἐπιστηρίζων πάντας τοὺς μαθητάς. [After spending time there \[in Antioch\], Paul departed and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples \(Acts 18:23\).](#)

appear to have been more concerned with trying to overthrow the occupying power than with seeking to prevent the Judean Christians from having communion with lawless Gentiles. It is not beyond dispute that the plot against Paul’s life in Jerusalem (Acts 23:12–15; cf. 20:3) was engineered by members of the Zealot party, as Jewett makes out;²⁰ the easy access of the conspirators to the Jewish authorities and their ready collaboration with them (Acts 23:14–15) suggests otherwise.²¹ The anti-Christian persecution in Judea described in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16, which Jewett implies was connected with the activities of the Zealots,²² can be satisfactorily explained without the supposition of such a connection.²³ Further, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that the Galatian agitators’ ‘program’ would show some sign of affinity with the aims of the Zealots who allegedly were exerting the pressure; but the offer to bring Gentile Christians to ‘perfection’ (Gal. 3:3) appears remote from Zealot interests.²⁴

[Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 3–8.]

When assessing the thematic contents of the letter, the above analysis makes it clear that the twin interconnected themes of Paul’s apostleship and his Gospel message become the organizing stack poles of every subtheme. The summarizing sections of the Praescriptio and Exordium at the beginning and the Conclusio segments at the end of the letter unquestionably frame the discussion in the letter body around these two themes. Understanding of the details of the letter depends primarily upon first grasping the heart of apostleship and Gospel as set forth by the apostle.

Paul’s apostleship claims are set forth not in a definition of meaning, something the apostle assumed his readers already clearly understood. Rather, the claims are made that although not a part of the original Twelve he nonetheless was called by direct revelation of God as an apostolic messenger on the same level as the Twelve: 1:1, 11–12. In the series of ‘evidences’ in chapters one and two, it becomes clear that not only was his calling directly from God and thus independent of any authorization by Peter or the Twelve in Jerusalem, but also that the validity of this calling was foundational to the validity of his Gospel message. Out of his encounter with the resurrected Christ on the Damascus road came a divine summons to preach the message of justification by faith apart of works of Law to not only Jews but non-Jews (cf. 1:15–17).

The heart of this message is set forth in the Salutatio expansion elements in 1: 4 as a divinely created opportunity for rescue from the clutches of Satan in this present evil age. It is based upon the crucifixion of Christ (1:4) and validated by His resurrection (1:1). It stands as an unchangeable and un-modifiable message (1:8–9). This message is for all humanity (2:15–21; 3:13–14).

In the Probatio section of chapters three and four especially, this rescue (1:4) is defined largely around the theme of liberation (έλευθερία). First and foremost, it stands as liberation from the Law which when taught as a means of salvation is a message of certain spiritual damnation (chapter three). The Law of God plays an important and valid role in preparing the individual to receive God’s rescue through Christ (as παιδαγώγος) but in no way can it produce that rescue itself. Only Christ can accomplish this. Law defines sin against God for us but is helpless to liberate us from enslavement to sin (chapter four). It becomes the tool of Satan rather than of God when set forth as a means of salvation. But the Galatians were being pressured by the false teachers to re-establish Law as a means of salvation -- something utterly illogical and foolish.

It is only through Christ that έλευθερία, *liberation*, has come. What that means is not freedom to serve our



sinful passions but instead to serve others in the love and care of Christ (chapters five and six). The χάριτος Χριστοῦ (1:6) provides the parameters of this liberation (5:1-6) and Law as a supposed means of liberation falls outside the realm of the divine grace. For the Galatians to return to Law as a means of salvation would position them beyond the saving grace of God in Christ.

The believer's calling in this divine rescue is ἐπ' ἔλευθερίᾳ, to liberation (5:13). This does not, however, mean freedom from all restraint of our sinful nature (εἰς ἀφορμὴν τῇ σαρκὶ, 5:13). Instead, it means that through divine love we serve one another (διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις, 5:13). Ironically, it is the Law that sums this up for believers (5:14). Therefore, what was impossible through Law as a vehicle of salvation becomes possible through the grace of Christ. And this powerfully liberating grace is activated in our lives through the presence and leadership of the Holy Spirit (5:16-6:10). In this divine presence, we serve others in

our liberation.

The Judaizing opponents at Galatia completely missed this understanding of the apostolic Gospel. Instead, they sought to substitute it with an alternative message that spelled spiritual ruin. Paul recognized this and vigorously condemned their message.

One of the ongoing challenges of the letter to the Galatians is relevancy to today's world. From the time of the church father Augustine onward the focus on the Law of Moses in Judaism as understood to stand behind the Judaizers at Galatia have been interpreted as a symbol of religious legalism. But from the 1960s and Krister Stendahl's lecture, [The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West](#), this symbolism has been seriously questioned and established as a false understanding of Paul's view of Judaism in his time. Although divergent views of [religious legalism](#) abound, what Paul attacked in this letter was a gross

misuse of the Law of God being set up as a vehicle of salvation. Obedience to the Law in the minds of his Judaizing opponents was an essential requirement for entrance into the grace of God. What God had revealed to Paul and what he had experienced from the Damascus road encounter onward made it clear to the apostle that this was a dangerous misuse of the sacred Law of God through Moses, and that adopting the Judaizing view would spell spiritual disaster for its adherents.

The relevancy of the letter to Galatians comes legitimately not in falsely associating the Judaizers as religious legalists. Rather, correct application comes from the signal given in 1:6-7. Anyone turning into an alternative version of the gospel message preached by Paul and the Twelve, whatever its nature, puts himself on the path to spiritual suicide. The Gospel revealed from heaven to the apostles is an unchanging and an unchangeable message, and must be proclaimed accurately for God to be willing to work in salvation for those outside the Kingdom of God.

The danger of the Judaizers in this document is the ever present danger of compromise, not religious legalism. Depraved human nature does not like stringent demands made, which come as the core essence of the apostolic Gospel. The ongoing inclination is to water it down somehow in order to make it more comfortable. By attempting to modify it we fall prey to Paul's prayer wish ἀνάθεμα ἔστω, *let him be anathema!*, in 1:8-9.

But in leaving it alone and just simply allowing it to guide our lives day by day, we discover the most wonderful liberation in living. We become free to be 'slaves' to others in loving ministry (5:1-6:10). This is genuine freedom at its best! Our human bent toward self centered egotism is broken. We enjoy a marvelous relationship with God through the guidance of His Spirit in our lives. The indescribable satisfaction of having real meaning on planet earth through service becomes uniquely ours as believers in Christ. Living rises to a level unimaginable otherwise.

The Judaizers in Galatia missed all this. What a pity! Unfortunately many professing Christians in our world are missing it as well. Paul passionately desired that those churches, which he and Barnabas had established, not miss these blessings from God as well and thus came this vigorous letter from the apostle to them.

9.2. First Thessalonians

Paul's first letter, Galatians, was composed from

somewhere in Macedonia on the second missionary journey, or perhaps just prior to arriving in Macedonia. His second letter was composed at Athens in the province of Achaia after passing through Macedonia with Silas, Timothy and others. Paul arrived in Macedonia sometime around 49 / 50 AD and within a few months, perhaps a year, he was in Athens, when this letter was composed to the Christian community at Thessalonica in the province of Macedonia.

Although written early in Paul's writing ministry, the letter displays textbook like use of basic Greek letter formatting styles, which reflect the work of someone quite knowledgeable of how to write letters effectively. Some of this, of course, would reflect the compositional skills of his writing secretary as well as his own skills. Added to this core structuring of the document are the creative variations and expansions that will come to typify most all of the thirteen letters in the Pauline corpus of the New Testament.

9.2.1 Praescriptio

The standard three *Praescriptio* elements are listed at the very beginning of the document. They are not as elaborate as the ones in Galatians, although they are built off the identical structure. We will observe some of these distinctives as we look at each of these elements.

Superscriptio: Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος
Paul and Silas and Timothy:

In comparing this Superscriptio with the one in Galatians notice some distinctives here.

Galatians Superscriptio:

1.1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων ούδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ Θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, 2 καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοί

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.

While the letter comes from multiple senders with Paul as the primary one, something different is present.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Three passages in particular, however, suggest that the letter should be read primarily as an embodiment of Paul's thought. In 2:18 the first person plural is replaced by the first person singular in the second part of the verse where Paul specifically identifies himself: διότι ἡθελήσαμεν ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἐγὼ μὲν Παῦλος καὶ ἄπολος δισὶ ('wherefore we wished to come to you, I Paul, once and again'). A few verses later, in 3:5, the first person singular occurs again. Given Paul's self-assertion in 2:18, we must assume that καγὼ ... ἔπειψα ('and I ... sent') in 3:5 also refers to Paul himself. This impression is further confirmed by the fact that the passage in question concerns an occasion when Timothy was sent as a substitute for the person who stands behind the 'I.' From other letters of Paul we know that this is precisely how Paul employed Timothy (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; Phil. 2:19). The other text in which the



The other senders are not named in Galatians but in First Thessalonians they are identified as Silas and Timothy by name. In doing this Paul then leaves off his title as ὅπόστολος since such a title would not have been appropriate for Silas and Timothy. Additionally, his status as an apostle is not an issue at Thessalonica as it was among the churches in the province of Galatia. In Thessalonica he was highly respected by the church. Thus not only does he leave off his title, but he then includes no expansion of it as a signal of coming themes in the letter body.

A comparison of [Paul's letters](#) with multiple senders listed reveals that where a title plays some role in the contents of the letter body, Paul will list it about himself, and occasionally an appropriate title for the other sender(s) when they are mentioned by name. Paul does not list a title after his name only in First and Second Thessalonians. Uniquely in Philippians he uses one title for him and Timothy appropriate to both of them, that of δοῦλοι, servants.

One particularity of note is the spelling of the name for Silas: Σιλουανὸς.⁵⁷ Most likely this plays off Silas' Latin name *Silvanus* brought over into Greek as Σιλουανὸς. The more natural Greek spelling of the Latin *Silvanus* is Σιλᾶς. The Latin based spelling is only used four times in the NT: 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:12, while Σιλᾶς shows up twelve

first person singular occurs is 5:27, where the author of the letter 'adjures' his readers to ensure that the letter is read to 'all the brothers.' The sheer authoritativeness of this injunction implies an author of the stature of Paul who could impose such a demand on his readers (see R. F. Collins, "Paul," 351–353 for further discussion of the 'I' passages)." [Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 67–68.]

⁵⁷Σιλουανός, οῦ, ὁ (Diod S 11, 27, 1, a Σ. as contemporary with the battle of Salamis [480 B.C.]; OGI 533, 50 [time of Augustus] and later ins and pap; Jos., Ant. 20:14; in rabbinic lit. סילען CIJ I, 596) *Silvanus*; surely the same man who appears in Ac as Σιλᾶς (q.v.). Either he had two names (like Paul), one Semit. and one Lat. (Zahn), or Σιλουανός is the Lat. form of the same name that is Grecized in Σιλᾶς (B-D-F §125, 2; Mlt-H. 109f; 146). **2 Cor 1:19** (v.l. Σιλβανός, which is also found Diod S 11, 41, 1); **1 Th 1:1; 2 Th 1:1** (s. also the subscr. of 2 Th); **1 Pt 5:12** (this pass. has given rise to the conclusion that Silvanus was somehow or other [as translator? in Sb 8246, 38 Germanus speaks before the court δι' Ἀνούσιωνος ἐρμηνεύοντος] connected w. the writing of 1 Pt; e.g., Zahn [*Einleitung II3 10f*], GWohlenberg [NKZ 24, 1913, 742–62], WBornemann [*Der erste Petrusbrief—eine Taufrede des Silvanus?* ZNW 19, 1920, 143ff], Harnack [*Mission I4 1923, 85*], LRadermacher [*Der 1 Pt u. Silvanus: ZNW 25, 1926, 287ff*]; ESELWYN, 1 Pt '46, 9–17 but s. WKümmel [*Introd. NT*, tr. HKee, '75, 416–25]).—M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 923.]

times exclusively in Acts.⁵⁸ Much less likely is the much later Hebrew spelling in rabbinic Judaism סילען suggesting a Semitic origin for Σιλουανὸς. Why Paul uses the latinized form here is not entirely clear. Perhaps it was because Silas had a distinctly Roman background more than a Greek one, and Paul desired to highlight this every time he referred to him. The NT texts imply rather strongly that Silas was Jewish, but with a Latin name most likely was Diaspora Jewish. But we can't be certain because no specific background information on him is ever provided in the NT. Perhaps Silas was also a Roman citizen as somewhat implied in Paul's statement to the Roman jailor in Acts 16:37.

Both he and Timothy were companions of Paul on the second missionary journey with Timothy having joined the group at Lystra in Galatia (cf. Acts 16). Silas first appears inside the NT as a trusted member of the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22, 32). He surfaces as a fellow missionary with Paul in Acts 15:40–18:5 and then disappears from the Acts narrative. He had been chosen by Paul after the rather intense disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark (Acts 15:40). All of this certainly points in the direction of Silas having the same viewpoint as Paul toward non-Jews coming into the Christian faith. Evidently he was more suited to the task of evangelizing Gentiles than others in the church at Antioch at the beginning of the second missionary journey.

The inclusion of both these men as letter senders along with Paul signals that at least they were well known by the Christian community in Thessalonica. Acts 17:1–9 describes the founding of that community by Paul, Silas, and Timothy -- and probably also Luke who joined the group either at Troas or Philippi. When Paul was forced to leave Macedonia from Jewish synagogue pressures both Timothy and Silas were left behind at Beroea to assist the newly formed Christian communities. But they had instructions to join Paul in the southern province of Achaia without too much delay (Acts 17:15).

Paul first landed at Athens in Achaia and spent some time there evangelizing. First Thessalonians 3:2 states that at least Timothy, most likely Silas as well, joined him in Athens. This somewhat differs from Luke's statement in Acts 18:5 that both Timothy and Silas joined Paul at Corinth upon coming from Macedonia.

Though scholars sometimes try to make a big issue over this apparent difference, the solution is simply

⁵⁸"The name Silvanus is a Roman cognomen, a Latinized form of Silas. Derived from the Latin *silva*, meaning 'wood,' Silvanus is also the name of a Roman deity, who represents the life-giving force of nature." [John Gillman, "Silas (Person)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 22.]

that Timothy and Silas joined Paul in Athens sometime during the month or so that he was in the city.⁵⁹ They brought news about the condition of the churches in Macedonia that included the community at Thessalonica. This prompted the writing of the first letter to the church which both of them carried back to Thessalonica. After delivering the letter and visiting the other communities at both Philippi and Beroea they returned again to Achaia and caught up with Paul now at Corinth. This prompted the writing of Second Thessalonians which they then carried back to Thessalonica, revisited the churches at Philippi and Beroea before rejoining Paul in Corinth during his eighteen month stay in the city before all of them returned to Judea.

The Acts 18:1 reference clearly implies in Luke's depiction that a generous financial offering was brought to Paul from the churches in Macedonia that relieved the apostle from splitting time earning a living and doing ministry. From that point he focused all of this time on ministry which enabled a more extensive evangelizing of the city.

Adscriptio: τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, [to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ](#).

This specification of readers is rather short and without much elaboration. The two most common elements, the specification of the group and the geographical location of the group, τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων [to the church of the Thessalonians](#), comprise the core of the *Adscriptio*. This is followed by the lengthy prepositional phrase ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, [in God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ](#), that stands as the exclusive expansion to the core.

One thing to be noted is the exact reproduction of this *Adscriptio* in Second Thessalonians only with the insertion of 'our': τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ **ἡμῶν** καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, [to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ](#),

Also interesting to note is the manner of addressing his letters to congregations during his active missionary work in comparison to how he addressed them upon being taken prisoner in Jerusalem. The *Adscriptio* in Romans (1:7) marks the switch in pattern.⁶⁰ The ear-

⁵⁹The one variable in this scenario is whether or not Silas made the first trip to Athens, or whether he remained in Macedonia and then returned with Timothy later when they found Paul in Corinth. The inclusion of Silas in the *Superscriptio* of First Thessalonians would point strongly toward him being in Athens at the time of the writing of this letter, as well as in Corinth with Timothy at the writing of Second Thessalonians. This would best account for the almost identical *Superscriptio* between these two letters.

⁶⁰Paul's earlier letters are explicitly addressed to churches (cf. 2 Thess 1:1; Gal 1:2; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1), but his later letters to churches are variously addressed to 'all God's beloved ..., called to be saints' (Rom 1:7); 'all the saints' (Phil 1:1); 'the saints and faithful brethren in Christ' (Col 1:2); 'the saints who are also faith-

ly pattern uses ἐκκλησίᾳ, [church](#), while the later pattern uses αἱρεῖσαι, [saints](#). To be sure, both designations are found in all of the letters but this beginning designation follows a specific pattern. And not much difference in meaning exists between the two terms. With the ending of Romans at chapter 15 anticipating imprisonment, it may well be that this reality loomed large in Paul's mind as he wrote to different congregations after finishing the third missionary journey. The time difference is from the late 40s to the mid 50s and then the mid 50s to the early 60s, about seven or eight years for both patterns.

The use of ἐκκλησίᾳ here in First Thessalonians to designate groups of house churches meeting independently across the city is not unusual. It is one of the most commonly used designations of Christian congregations in the NT with 114 uses. The Jewish heritage of the term becomes obvious with ἐκκλησίᾳ used six of these 114 times in reference to Israel: Acts 7:38; 19:39, 41; Heb. 2:12; 12:23. The emphasis is upon 'gathering' or 'meeting' of a group of God's people. They come together as a group under His direction. In the collective sense of the geographical designations in the *Adscripta* each of the house church gatherings reflected one part of the larger people of God in meeting to glorify God as His people in the city. Drawing close lines of distinction in subcategories is mostly the nonsense born of modern denominationalism.⁶¹ Although the moderns dis-

ful in Christ Jesus' (Eph 1:1)." [F. F. Bruce, *I and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 6–7.]

⁶¹General dictionaries like Passow, Pape, K. Jacobitz-E. E. Seller (1839–41), Benseler 15(1931), give the two senses 1. 'assembly' and 2. 'church'; they call the former secular and the latter biblical or ecclesiastical. Following the general scheme, Liddell-Scott refers also to the LXX and gives us the following senses: 1. 'assembly duly summoned, less general than σύλλογος,' 2. a. in the LXX 'the Jewish congregation,' b. in the NT 'the Church as a body of Christians.'

"NT lexicons follow the same arrangement, but go on to make a distinction between the Church a. as the whole body of believers and b. as the individual congregation, e.g., the house church. This raises the question whether a. or b. comes first, i.e., in what sense we have a succession as well as co-existence of the two meanings. Various answers are given. Wilke-Grimm. has as the *christianus sensus the coetus Christianorum* in the following order: ... qui alicubi regionum, urbium, vicorum eiusmodi coetum constituant atque in unam societatem coniuncti sunt, and universus Christianorum coetus per totam terram dispersus. The Roman Catholic F. Zorell (Lexic. Graec. Novi Testamenti 2[1931]) has the opposite order, *coetus religiosus ... universitas eorum qui ad societatem religiosam a Christo institutam pertinent, and ecclesia aliqua particularis, i.e. alicuius regionis vel civitatis Christi fideles suo episcopo subditi, fere == dioecesis*. Pr.-Bauer accepts the former order: 'The congregation as the gathering of Christians living in a given place, and universally the Church in which all those who are called are together'; he goes on to speak accordingly of the local and the universal ἐκκλησίᾳ. The dictionaries vary in their distinc-

tion between the congregation and the Church. In some passages it is hard to tell which is really meant according to our current use of the terms.

The distinctions mentioned are mostly those of denomination or school rather than of lexical or biblical and theological enquiry. Thus an Anglican may speak of the ἐκκλησία as the one Church, ‘the body of Christians.’ A Roman Catholic will begin with the universal ecclesia on the basis of Mt. 16:18,1 and he will then go on to emphasise the subordination of the individual congregation to the bishop. The orthodox Protestant will refer first to the whole community, while the liberal Protestant will think of the local congregation, and some confusion may be caused by earlier territorial church government (*alicubi regionum*). The translations and commentaries reflect this. As always, Cr.-Kö. is a notable exception. This digs deeper, and from the standpoint of biblical theology reaches more valuable lexical conclusions. On the basis of the OT use of ἐκκλησία for the total community of Israel, it speaks of the ‘saved community of the NT’ which finds expression first as the total community and then as the same community in ‘local circumscription’ (a carefully selected phrase). Express reference is made to the fact that there is not always a hard and fast distinction between the local community and the universal community. In this respect the remark of Zorell is apposite: *Cum primo tempore 1 et 2 (sc. ecclesia universalis et ecclesia particularis) coinciderent, ad utrumvis licebit referre A.* (Ac.) 2:47; 5:11 al.

In translation and exposition of ἐκκλησία there is no point in the pedantic piling up of different expressions. This is primarily shown by the simple but cogent fact that the NT always uses the same word even where we usually distinguish between the ‘Church’ and the ‘congregation.’ The further fact that the same word is used in secular Greek on the one side and the OT and NT on the other is an additional reason why we should try to find a single rendering. We must first ask whether we might not always use either ‘Church’ or ‘congregation’ in the NT. This concern for a single, unequivocal rendering leads us further and raises the decisive questions of church government in the NT: How is the so-called Church related to the so-called congregation? What is the bearing of Mt. 16:18? Is the primitive community at Jerusalem Church or congregation? What is its relation to other communities throughout the Roman Empire? What does ἐκκλησία mean in Jewish Christianity (Peter), in Gentile Christianity (Paul), in primitive Catholicism? We must also ask whether a single translation, Church or congregation, can be adopted for the whole range of biblical usage. This enquiry also leads us further and raises the question of the interrelation of the OT and the NT. As a Heb. term lies behind the LXX ἐκκλησία,² it is also necessary to find the Aram. equivalent which would be used by Jesus and the first congregation in Jerusalem. This is another question which plunges us at once into material problems. Finally, we must ask whether a single rendering cannot be found to cover all Gk. usage, secular as well as sacred. ‘Community’ or ‘assembly’ might be suggested. But this again leads us a step further and raises the question of the special term which the NT community had for itself. Why did it avoid a cultic term and choose instead a secular one?

In both the secular and the biblical use of ἐκκλησία the dictionaries distinguish between the assembling of men and the men thus assembled. Hence a *prima facie* case V 3, p 504 can be made out for a word like ‘assembly,’ which has both an abstract and a concrete sense.”

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 3:502–504.]

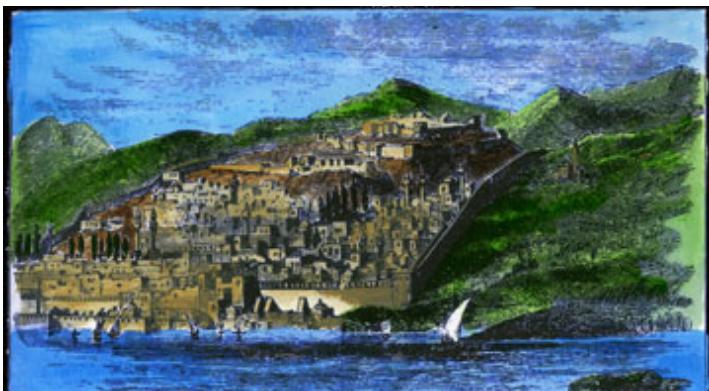
tinctions are perceived as important, one must never forget that this discussion has absolutely no foundation in the NT, and would not have occurred to the apostles. The simple visible gathering of a group of people committed to Christ is the heart of ἐκκλησία in the NT. Paul sees these either in terms of individual house church groups (cf. Rom. 16: 5) or as in the *Adscripta* as one collection of gatherings across a city, or cities as in the case of Gal. 1. Both the Jewish background and also the extensive use of ἐκκλησία in the Greek social structures for group meetings⁶² provide the foundation for understanding what Paul meant here in First Thessalonians. The rest is useless theological baggage obscuring our understanding of the NT text.



The open meetings of groups of believers in Thessalonica made an important statement to the city. Although the Jewish synagogue would claim the term קהילה which the LXX renders as ἐκκλησία, the assertion of believers in this label is their right to this term as the new people of God in Christ. The Jewish gravitation toward συναγωγή for an open gathering of God’s people⁶³ may have very well opened the door for the Christian preference for ἐκκλησία, with the almost iden-

⁶²“The Greek word was used of a summoned assembly, for example, a regularly summoned political body (cf. Josephus, Ant. 12.164) or a public gathering of a more general sort (cf. Acts 19:32).” [Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 70.]

⁶³It is critically important to not overlook the historical reality that in the first century virtually all Jewish synagogue meetings took place in private homes. Most secular social groups did the same thing and would label their meeting as an ἐκκλησία.



tical meaning.⁶⁴ Therefore one understands much of the tension between synagogue and church in the Diaspora, where Paul worked and preached. With non-Jews rapidly becoming the dominate ethnic element in these Christian gatherings the tensions begin reaching a boiling point. Also this creates a growing distinction between the synagogue and church where the synagogue enjoys *religio licita* status with the government and the church doesn't.

The geographical designation Θεσσαλονικέων, the personal noun from Θεσσαλονικέυς, *of the Thessalonians*, does not seem to have a particular significance as used in the *Adscriptio*. Both Luke in Acts and Paul in several letters shifts back and forth at will between the pure geographical noun Θεσσαλονίκη, *Thessalonica*, and the personal geographical noun Θεσσαλονικέύς, *Thessalonian*.⁶⁵ First and Second Thessalonians are the only two letters where just the personal geographical noun is used.

The Greek city by the name of Θεσσαλονίκη dates back to 316 BCE and was named after Alexander the

⁶⁴“Because the Christian community constituted the new people of God who assembled regularly for worship and fellowship, the word was taken over by Paul and others as a designation for any local Christian community (cf. 1 Cor. 4:17; Gal. 1:22), for the wider Christian community (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28), and even for house churches (Rom. 16:5). Use of ἐκκλησία for the assembly of the Christian community may also reflect the desire for a distinctively “Christian” identity in the face of Jewish use of συναγωγή for local Jewish congregations (cf. Acts 6:9).” [Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 70.]

⁶⁵Θεσσαλονικέυς, ἔως, ὁ (Mel., HE 4, 26, 10; Steph. Byz. s.v. Θεσσαλονίκη) **Thessalonian**, *an inhabitant of Thessalonica* Ac 20:4; 27:2; 1 Th 1:1, ins; 2 Th 1:1, ins.

Θεσσαλονίκη, ης, ἡ (Polyb. 22, 11, 2; Strabo 7 Fgm. 24; Ps.-Lucian, Asin. 46; anon. De Historia Diadochorum [time unknown]: 155 Fgm. 2, 3 Jac.; ins [SIG index vol. IV 94]) **Thessalonica**, *a city in Macedonia on the Thermaic Gulf*. Paul founded a congregation here Ac 17:1, 11, 13; Phil 4:16; 2 Ti 4:10.—BHHW III 1968; DACL XV 1 and 624–713; Kl. Pauly V 761–63.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 454.]

Great’s stepsister.⁶⁶ It had a checkered past in its dealings with the Romans, sometimes being on the winning side and often not, in the midst of the internal struggles for dominance in the transition from Roman Republic to Roman Empire. It was located on the important *Via Egnatia* as an important port city. Along this Roman road, Philippi to Amphipolis to Apollonia and to Thessalonica were about 30 to 35 miles apart, requiring a two day journey to each one. By the middle of the first Christian century the city was relatively prosperous and enjoyed the favor of Rome. By this point in time the process of “Romanization” of the culture in the city was unusually thorough for cities in this part of the ancient world.⁶⁷

The tumultuous beginning of the Christian church there is described by Luke in Acts 17:1-9. From this description it appears that Paul and his missionary team were in the city barely a month before being forced out by Jewish opposition. The city leaders ended up being manipulated by Jewish leaders who were the real villains in this scene. The unfounded charge of treason against Rome proved to be the needed ‘hot button’ with the authorities that these Jewish leaders could use. Just calling Christianity a new religion being introduced would not have gained the attention of these authori-

⁶⁶City mentioned in Acts 17:1–13; 1–2 Thessalonians; Phil 4:16; and 2 Tim 4:10. It was founded in 316 B.C.E. by Cassander, the son of Antipater, whom Alexander the Great had left in charge of Macedonia. It was named in honor of Cassander’s wife, Thesallonike, a stepsister of Alexander and the last surviving member of the ancient royal family of Macedonia. Built at the head of the Thermaikos Gulf below the Hortiates mountains, the city rose steeply above its harbor.

“It is possible that Thessalonica was constructed on the site of an earlier settlement, Therme. Remains of foundations and fragments of an archaic temple (ca. 500 B.C.E.) have been found in the W part of the city, but it has not been possible to ascertain the deity in whose honor it was erected or the structure’s precise size and plan. A series of ancient Greek coins without a legend but bearing a Pegasus obverse type found at Thessalonica has been connected with Therme (Gaebler 1906). On the basis of the association, it has been suggested that Therme was a Corinthian foundation, colonized perhaps under Periander’s rule (ca. 600 B.C.E.).”

[Holland L. Hendrix, “Thessalonica (Place),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:523.]

⁶⁷“Aside from a number of tombs, some pottery, terra-cotta figurines, and smaller objects, surprisingly few Hellenistic remains have been discovered in Thessalonica. An inscription dated to 60 B.C.E. (IT [= Edson 1972]no. 7) found near the Roman forum makes mention of an agora. It is possible that this earlier Hellenistic agora was rebuilt later into the Roman forum, at least part of which has been excavated. Beneath the forum’s pavement were found varieties of Hellenistic pottery and a late Hellenistic “Atlas” now on display in the city’s Archaeological Museum.” [Holland L. Hendrix, “Thessalonica (Place),” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:523.]

ties. From archaeological records it appears that the city itself was relatively open minded about accepting the worship of new gods into the city. Numerous Egyptian deities were brought into the city during this same period of time and received very favorably. Ultimately the irony is the later flourishing of Christianity and the complete disappearance of Judaism from the city.

The limited expansion elements of ἐν Θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, in God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ, serves the purpose of affirming the role of both God and Christ in the existence of the church in the city. The Jewish synagogues in the city would have claimed the reference to God, but would have vigorously denied the latter. The close linking of God and Christ more typically surfaces in the *Salutatio* of Paul's letters rather than in the *Adscriptio*. His mentioning of this in the *Ascriptio* accounts for not listing it in the *Salutatio*.

Additionally, the congregation in Thessalonica is not labeled τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ Θεοῦ, the church of God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1). Instead it is τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν Θεῷ, the church of the Thessalonians in God. This has a strong emphasis on the very existence of the life of the church being in God and then also in Christ.⁶⁸ It would have stressed this identity especially to those Jewish Christian members with continued participation in the Jewish synagogue that brought criticism toward this new Christian religion. Clearly the theme of the Thessalonian church being both in God and in Christ will surface repeatedly in the letter body of this document.

Salutatio: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη Grace to you and peace.

This initial greeting is the shortest of all those in Paul's letters. For a foundational understanding of the role of the *Salutatio* in ancient letters and of Paul's distinctive use of it in his letters, see the above discussion on the *Salutatio* in Gal. 1:1-5. The principles set forth

⁶⁸“Here, however, the believing community in Thessalonica is not called the church of God, but the church ‘in God.’ This is an unusual expression in the Pauline corpus, where otherwise “in God” is used of boasting in God (Rom 2:17; 5:11) or of being hidden in God (Eph 3:9; Col 3:3). On the other hand, ‘in Christ,’ ‘in Christ Jesus’ or ‘in the Lord’ is a characteristic Pauline expression, especially when it has ‘incorporative’ force, pointing to believers’ participation in Christ’s risen life or their membership in his body. If this is the force of the words ‘in ... the Lord Jesus Christ’ here, then ‘in God the Father’ must be understood in the same way. This is so uncharacteristic of Paul that Best (62) thinks the preposition ἐν must have instrumental force: ‘the Christian community brought into being by God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.’ (The affirmation of Acts 17:28, ‘in him we live and move and have our being,’ perhaps quoted from Epimenides of Crete, refers to the old creation and not to the new order of grace.) Possibly Silvanus rather than Paul is responsible for the present wording, which designates God and Christ as the sphere in which the church exists.” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 7.]

there are assumed here as well.

The twin Greek and Hebrew peace greetings are used by Paul here. The ethnic composition of the house church groups in the city of both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians may play some role in this unique combination of greeting. The formula nature of the statement is reflected in the absence of any verb. Evidently the typical joining of God and Christ as a common source of greeting is omitted here, perhaps due to the unusual insertion of it in the *Adscriptio*. But one shouldn't read very much into this, since it is added in both places in the *Adscriptio / Salutatio* of Second Thessalonians.

The contents of the letter body reflect that the apostle feels himself to be on good terms with the Christian community in Thessalonica. His commendation of them in the expansion elements of the Proem confirms this positive stance toward the congregation. Therefore he does not believe that special emphasis upon their relationship needs to be expressed here in the *Salutatio*.

9.2.2 Proem, 1:2-10

2 Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ Θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν μνείαν ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, ἀδιαλείπτως 3 μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, 4 εἰδότες, ἀδελφοὶ ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ [τοῦ] Θεοῦ, τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν, 5 ὅτι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὑμῶν οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν λόγῳ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ καὶ [ἐν] πληροφορίᾳ πολλῇ, καθὼς οἴδατε οὗτοι ἐγενήθημεν [ἐν] ὑμῖν δι' ὑμᾶς. 6 Καὶ ὑμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε καὶ τοῦ κυρίου, δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν Θλίψει πολλῇ μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἀγίου, 7 ὥστε γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς τύπον πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ. 8 ἀφ' ὑμῶν γάρ ἐξήχηται ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μόνον ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ [ἐν τῇ] Ἀχαΐᾳ, ἀλλ' ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν ἡ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἔξελήλυθεν, ὥστε μὴ χρείαν ἔχειν ὑμᾶς λαλεῖν τι. 9 αὐτοὶ γάρ περὶ ἡμῶν ἀπαγγέλλουσιν ὅποιαν εἴσοδον ἔσχομεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, καὶ πῶς ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων δουλεύειν Θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ 10 καὶ ἀναμένειν τὸν οὐτὸν ἀπό τῶν οὐρανῶν, ὃν ἤγειρεν ἐκ [τῶν] νεκρῶν, Ἰησοῦν τὸν ρύμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ὄργης τῆς ἔρχομένης.

2 We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in

power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. 9 For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Here is where we first encounter one of Paul's almost formula like sentences expressing a formal prayer wish in behalf of his targeted readers. The *Prayer of Thanksgiving* is expressed in a single sentence in vv. 2-5, which a little shorter than the typical ones. VV. 6-10 become an extended tribute to the quality of Christian commitment that had typified the Thessalonians from the beginning to the writing of this letter several months later. This replaces the more common *Prayer of Intercession* for his readers in the many other *Proema* of his letters.

Prayer of Thanksgiving. vv. 2-5. This single sentence is built off the core main clause of Εύχαριστοῦμεν τῷ Θεῷ, *we give thanks to God*. Everything else is an expansion of this foundational declaration.

Εύχαριστοῦμεν τῷ Θεῷ

- 1) πάντοτε
- 2) περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν
- 3) μνείαν ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν,
- 4) ἀδιαλείπτως μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν,
- 5) εἰδότες, ἀδελφοὶ ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ [τοῦ] Θεοῦ, τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν, ὅτι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν λόγῳ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ καὶ [ἐν] πληροφορίᾳ πολλῇ, καθὼς οἴδατε οἷοι ἐγενήθημεν [ἐν] ὑμῖν δι' ὑμᾶς.

When separated out into the component elements it becomes a beautiful picture of gratitude by Paul for his readers. The adverb followed by the adverbial preposition then followed by *three adverbial functioning participle phrases* provide a detailed expression of his stance toward the congregation.

The introductory declaration Εύχαριστοῦμεν τῷ Θεῷ is repeated either in the singular or plural depending upon how many senders are specified in the Su-

perscriptio in 1 Thess. 1:2; 1 Cor. 1:4; Rom. 1:8; Phlm. 4; Col. 1:3; Phil. 1:3. Slight deviations of it surface in Εύχαριστεῖν ὄφείλομεν τῷ Θεῷ, *we ought to give thanks to God* (2 Thess 1:3); Εὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεὸς καὶ πατήρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3); Χάριν ἔχω τῷ ἐνδυναμώσαντί με, *I am grateful to the One who strengthened me* (1 Tim. 1:12); Χάριν ἔχω τῷ Θεῷ, *I have praise to God* (2 Tim. 1:3).

The present tense form of the verb Εύχαριστοῦμεν stresses ongoing gratitude to God for the Thessalonians. The formula nature of the core expression signal an 'opening prayer' for the letter following in the standard Jewish synagogue opening prayer which early Christians incorporated into their meeting patterns. Also Paul's letters end with a prayer following that same meeting pattern of ending with a prayer.

This was important for Paul and the impact of his letters. The formula pattern in the opening prayer had the effect of formally asking God to bless the group, and as the letter was read by the one who brought it from Paul the listeners could hear the voice of the respected apostle asking God to bless them, as well as acknowledging to God his appreciation of them in their service to Christ.

The expansion elements in v. 2-5 add richness of detail to Paul's gratitude to God for his readers.

1) **πάντοτε, always.** This temporal adverb underscores the apostle's continuing gratitude to God for the Thessalonians. It highlights the continuing action of the present tense verb. As a compound adverb built from πάν plus τοτε the strict literal sense is *at all times*.

2) **περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν, for all of you.** The inclusiveness of Paul's continuing gratitude is stated by this prepositional phrase. Although commentators will often debate whether the phrase modifies the main verb Εύχαριστοῦμεν (before it) or the participle ποιούμενοι (after it), the reality of Greek syntax in this world was that by placing it strategically between the two, it impacted both. That is, Paul was grateful for all of the believers at Thessalonica, and also, he prayed for all of them regularly as well.

3) **μνείαν ποιούμενοι ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, making mention (of you all)⁶⁹ in our prayers.** The phrase μνείαν ποιούμενοι is somewhat common prayer language in Paul: Rom. 1:9 (μνείαν ὑμῶν ποιοῦμαι); Eph. 1:16 (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν μνείαν ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου); Phlm. 4 (μνείαν σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν

⁶⁹Note how several manuscript copyists added ὑμῶν between μνείαν and ποιούμενοι in order to smooth out the construction: ^{x2} C D F G K L P Ψ 104. 365. 630. 1175. 1241. 1505. 2464 M it vg^{cl}. ww sy; Ambst [Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus*, ed. Barbara Aland et al., 28. revidierte Auflage. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 622.]

μου). In the secular Attic writers, μνείαν ποιούμενοι has the equivalent meaning of ‘mentioning’ (cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 254a; Protagoras 317e). In the prayer life of the apostle, he mentioned the Thessalonians to the Lord in gratefulness. The phrase μνείαν ποιούμενοι doesn’t itself imply praying as 3:6 illustrates. Thus the addition of ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν ἡμῶν, *in our prayers*, specifies Paul’s prayers as his point of mentioning the Thessalonians to God. Important to remember here: ‘our’ prayers, thus alluding to a regular pattern of the three individuals in the *Superscriptio* coming together to pray for various concerns, and the Thessalonians were one of those concerns.

4) **ἀδιαλείπτως μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν..., unceasingly remembering your....** The temporal adverb ἀδιαλείπτως is very similar in meaning to πάντοτε with both emphasizing continuing verbal action. The participle μνημονεύοντες is virtually a synonym of μνείαν ποιούμενοι. The introductory expression here ἀδιαλείπτως μνημονεύοντες essentially repeats the preceding phrase μνείαν ποιούμενοι in order to put specifics on the table regarding things that Paul is grateful to God for the Thessalonians.

In lyrical phraseology, Paul mentions a triology of virtues among the Thessalonians:

**τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως
καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης
καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος**

τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν,

These three virtues -- work, labor, endurance -- are focused on two objectives:

τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
in our Lord Jesus Christ
ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν,
before our God and Father

Thus faith, love, and hope are centered *in our Lord Jesus Christ*. Additionally these are being expressed in the very presence of God within the imagery of temple service done before the Holy of Holies. Further, the subjective genitive case function is used for these three qualities. The impact of this is simply:

*work produced by faith
labor produced by love
endurance produced by hope.*

The structure is just complicated enough to make clear English translation exceedingly difficult, but relatively simple in Greek syntax.⁷⁰

⁷⁰“The thanksgiving’s rhythmic flair is matched in rhetorical force only by its choice of diction, as if Paul brushed his epistolary canvas in colors drawn from the rich palette of the Septuagint or from other Jewish literature. Often deemed a signal of ‘group identity or a close sense of group kinship’ (e.g., Deut 15:3),³² the expression ἀδελφοί (*adelphoi*, ‘brothers and sisters’) here connotes a fictive kinship group, all of whose members can claim God as their

5) **εἰδότες, ἀδελφοὶ ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ [τοῦ] Θεοῦ, τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν, ὅτι..., knowing, brothers beloved by God, your election that....** This final appendage to Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ Θεῷ both defines specific thanksgiving and serves also to set up the lengthy tribute in vv. 6-10. The apostle is grateful for the divine election of the Thessalonians.⁷¹ What Paul means by τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν is explained by the epegetically functioning ὅτι in v. 5.⁷² This explanation is somewhat surprising in its focus on Paul’s initial preaching of the Gospel to them and their choosing to accept this message.

Paul’s expressing thanksgiving to God grows out of what he knows about the Thessalonians: Εὐχαριστοῦμεν.... εἰδότες. The knowledge here has come from observation of the behavior of these people after professing faith in Christ. Their actions provide clear evidence of the hand of God upon them changing and directing their lives. Central to this τὴν ἐκλογὴν is the clear indication of being objects of God’s love: ἀδελφοὶ ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ [τοῦ] Θεοῦ. God has committed Himself to them, and they in turn are committed to Him in sacrificial service.

In v. 5 Paul gives an excellent picture of his evangelistic preaching of the Gospel.⁷³ It contains several aspects:

τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς
ἐν λόγῳ μόνῳ
ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει
καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ
καὶ [ἐν] πληροφορίᾳ πολλῇ,
καθὼς οἴδατε
οἵοι ἐγενήθημεν
[ἐν] ὑμῖν δι’ ὑμᾶς.

The double use of the aorist γίνομαι at the beginning and ending of this depiction underscores the divine presence and activity in Paul’s preaching of the Gos-

Father (cf. 1:1). Similarly, the expressions “‘eloved by God’ (Deut 33:12) and ‘chosen’ (Deut 4:37; 7:6–8; 10:14–15; 14:2) are election terms drawn from the OT, leading one scholar to aver: ‘It is clear by this early stage in his thinking Paul has already developed the concept of the church as the Israel of God.’³³ [Abraham Smith, ‘The First Letter to the Thessalonians,’ in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 688.]

⁷¹Divine ἐκλογή is linked to ἐκλέγομαι in God choosing someone for Himself. The purpose of such choosing is stated in Eph. 1:4 as εἴναι ὑμᾶς ἀγίους, *that we might be holy*.

One should not forget that the secular use of both noun and verb was simply to choose or select something or someone. The attached baggage to the modern religious use of ‘divine election’ was not present in NT usage.

⁷²The NRSV ‘because’ for ὅτι is not correct. The clause defines the Thessalonians’ experience of being called to God through the preaching of Paul. Not gives a reason for it.

⁷³This provides us a ‘theological’ description of Luke’s ‘historical’ description in Acts 17:1-9

pel. This is ‘fleshed’ out both in the qualities of that preaching and in the pure character of Paul in preaching it. All of these emphases stand in stark contrast to the ungodly behavior of the synagogue leaders in their treatment of Paul and his message, which Luke emphasizes in Acts 17:1-9.

The qualities specified are set up in a not only ...but also pattern. The first trait ἐν λόγῳ μόνον, *in word only*, underscores the oral communication of the Gospel in that initial presentation. Luke provides an insightful depiction of this in Acts. 17:2-3

2 κατὰ δὲ τὸ εἰωθὸς τῷ Παύλῳ εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐπὶ σάββατα τρία διελέξατο αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν γραφῶν, 3 διανοίγων καὶ παρατιθέμενος ὅτι τὸν χριστὸν ἔδει παθεῖν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστὸς [ό] Ιησοῦς ὃν ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν.

2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days discussed with them from the scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, “This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you.”

What Paul labels as ἐν λόγῳ, Luke describes with verbs of speaking: διελέξατο αὐτοῖς, *discussing with them*; διανοίγων καὶ παρατιθέμενος ὅτι, *explaining and demonstrating that*. No terms like preaching (κηρύσσω), proclaiming (καταγγέλλω) etc. are used either by Paul or Luke. The reason is due to the situational specific setting of a Friday evening Jewish synagogue setting, as described in Acts 17:1-9. The gatherings were not for ‘worship’ but for prayer and Torah study. The study of the Torah began with a reading and was followed by vigorous discussion and debate regarding its applicational meaning(s).⁷⁴ Thus Paul as one invited to present his ideas was given the privilege to read portions of the Torah, followed by supporting sections of the Prophets and the Writings. Once these were read, he presented his interpretation. This in turn was followed by opposing critiques and probing questions regarding various interpretive points made. All of this Paul labels τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐγενήθη εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν λόγῳ, *our Gospel was presented to you not just by word*. Luke, on the other hand, describes the same thing in the more conventional terms διελέξατο αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν γραφῶν, διανοίγων καὶ παρατιθέμενος ὅτι, *he was discussing with them from the scriptures, as he was explaining and present-*

ing that...⁷⁵

For Paul the bottom line of this presentation was not simply how he presented it. Far more important was the spiritual dynamic at work from God in the presentation. The presentation dynamics are defined as ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ καὶ [ἐν] πληροφορίᾳ πολλῇ, *but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in deep assurance*. What Paul recalled about that experience was that what was presented was done in the expression of divine authority and power, not in a man’s skills. Central to this was the active presence and working the the Holy Spirit not just in Paul’s presentation but more importantly in the lives of the listeners. Out of this came a presentation saturated with confidence and assurance this Christ is indeed the promised Messiah as presented in the Torah. Important to Paul was the memory of how deeply God worked in the minds and hearts of those hearing his presentation.

The final recollection is an important one: καθὼς οἶδατε οἵοι ἐγενήθημεν [ἐν] ὑμῖν δι’ ὑμᾶς, *just as you know the character of us who presented among you for your sakes*. The genuiness and spiritual purity of the presenter are just as crucial as his message, for they become a major persuader used by God to convince the listerner and to validate his message.

Did everyone in the synagogue respond positively? Absolutely not, according to Luke in Acts 17:4-5a, καὶ τινες ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπείσθησαν καὶ προσεκληρώθησαν τῷ Παύλῳ καὶ τῷ Σιλᾷ, τῶν τε σεβομένων Ἑλλήνων πλῆθος πολύ, γυναικῶν τε τῶν πρώτων οὐκ ὄλγα. Ζηλώσαντες δὲ οἱ Ιουδαῖοι..., *Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women*. 5 But the Jews became jealous,... Both Jews and non-Jews accepted Paul’s Gospel, but the majority of the Jews in the synagogue did not.

With deep insight into what happened in that earlier experience, Paul labels this τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν, *your election*. That is, their positive response reflected God’s choosing of them to become His people, in contrast to the synagogue claims. God was at work and in this Gospel presentation brought into His people those who accepted the message of Paul.

⁷⁴This was standard and also reflected the educational training of Jewish boys from early childhood. Gaining a correct understanding of an issue could only be achieved through presentation of conflicting interpretations that would be evaluated back and forth until consensus was reached. In adulthood the Jewish male continued this pattern of learning in the Friday evening synagogue meetings.

⁷⁵The highly picturesque language of Luke’s verbs is impossible to capture in translation. διαλέγομαι has the sense of ‘talking all the way through a topic’ with an instructional thrust. The old former Pharisee set out to teach his listeners something new about the Torah. διανοίγω has the core sense of opening a topic to full exposure to others to see and understand. His goal was to so open up the Torah to these listeners that they could clearly see this new understanding. παρατίθημι has the sense of setting an idea in front of someone by standing it side by side with another idea and establishing connecting links. Here Paul put Christ as Messiah alongside the Torah and linked the two together in the presence of the synagogue listeners.

Extended Tribute, vv. 6-10. Usually Paul moves from a *Prayer of Thanksgiving* to a *Prayer of Intercession* in these longer poems. But parallel to this second prayer is the noting of the existence of problems and needs in the congregations. He signals by this prayer some of what he intends to address in the letter body. But in the instance of this first letter to the Thessalonians, he has nothing but praise to offer and no criticisms. So the Prayer of Intercession is replaced by an extended praise of the Thessalonian believers.

The overarching structure is the core complement ὑμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε καὶ τοῦ κυρίου, *you became immitators of us and of the Lord*, in the first sentence (vv. 6-7). This is followed by two supporting sentences, each introduced by the causal conjunction γάρ in v. 8 and in vv. 9-10. All three sentences are loaded with expansion elements that ‘flesh out’ the primary idea with details.

Core complement, vv. 6-7. 6 Καὶ ὑμεῖς μιμηταὶ ἡμῶν ἐγενήθητε καὶ τοῦ κυρίου, δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἀγίου, 7 ὥστε γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς τύπον πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ Αχαΐᾳ. 6 **And you became imitators of us and of the Lord**, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

For early Christians, with no New Testament scriptures available, knowing how to properly live the Christian life depended largely upon a visible example. In the apostle Paul who first preached the Gospel to them they found a worthy example. But also that of Silas and Timothy provided insights as well. This pattern of ‘immitating’ would be stressed all through Paul’s ministry as is reflected in Gal. 4:12; Phil. 3:17; 4:9. But the example of these men was worthy to follow only because it exemplified that of Christ Himself.

The atmosphere for the imitation was the unique mixture of persecution and joy: δεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ μετὰ χαρᾶς πνεύματος ἀγίου, *having welcomed the Word in much affliction with joy from the Holy Spirit*. The initial group of believers referenced in Acts 17:4 paid a big price for their commitment. When the mob tried to find Paul at the home of Jason, one of these believers, both he and some other believers, Ἰάσονα καὶ τινας ἀδελφοὺς, were dragged before the local magistrates and forced to put up bail pledging they were not seeking to overthrow the empire with their new religious beliefs (17:8-9).

But what the synagogue leaders did not understand



was that, contrary to customary thinking that to get in trouble with the local authorities was a stigma, these new believers rather found the joy of God in this because it helped them identify with Christ who had suffered persecution in dying for them on the cross. Their persecution became a validation from Heaven of the genuineness of their commitment and of their experience.

What was the impact of this kind of conversion experience? ὥστε γενέσθαι ὑμᾶς τύπον πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ Αχαΐᾳ, *so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia*. All across these two significant Roman provinces others who were coming to faith in Christ had an example worthy to follow. Built into his declaration is the assumption that the established communities in these two provinces by the missionary team would automatically be spreading out to towns and cities in their province. The letter was written just a few months after Paul came through Thessalonica. Thus this sharing of the Gospel by these initial communities would have taken place rapidly.

First supporting declaration, v. 8. ἀφ' ὑμῶν γάρ ἐξήχηται ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μόνον ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ [ἐν τῇ] Αχαΐᾳ, ἀλλ' ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν ἡ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἐξελήλυθεν, ὥστε μὴ χρείαν ἔχειν ὑμᾶς λαλεῖν τι. *For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it.*

Here Paul asserts that news of the Christian conversion of these folks in Thessalonica has already begun to spread, due in part to the interaction of new converts in different cities but also due in part to the Jewish synagogue spreading news about what had happened in Thessalonica. Especially significant in a cultural atmosphere where non-Jewish interest in anything Jewish would have attracted attention, that numbers of these folks were converting to a religious faith in a Jewish leader such as Christ would have really caught attention. The reports especially from Timothy and Silas, as they found their way to Athens, would have given Paul some awareness of this. But I suspect that other sources while in Athens provided this information as well. With Thessalonica both as a port city and as a major stopping point on the *Via Egnatia*, news could and did travel out rapidly in several directions. The courageous commitment of these people to Christ became a point of common discussion.

Paul concludes with the comment that their example so speaks for itself that he doesn’t need to describe it further: ὥστε μὴ χρείαν ἔχειν ὑμᾶς λαλεῖν τι.

Second supporting declaration, vv. 9-10. 9 αὗτοί

γὰρ περὶ ἡμῶν ἀπαγγέλλουσιν ὅποίαν εῖσοδον ἔσχομεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, καὶ πῶς ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων δουλεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ 10 καὶ ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, ὃν ἥγειρεν ἐκ [τῶν] νεκρῶν, Ἰησοῦν τὸν ρύμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ὄργης τῆς ἐρχομένης. **For these inform concerning us what kind of welcome we have with you, and how you turned to God from idols in order to serve the living and true God and how you await His Son out of heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus Who rescues us from the coming wrath.**

This second declaration primarily elaborates upon the kind of reception of the missionaries and their message given by these who became believers in Thessalonica. This complements the first supporting statement asserting the exemplary manner of their commitment and how news of it spread rapidly.

Paul's unnamed sources of information, αὐτοὶ... ἀπαγγέλλουσιν, reported on the welcoming of Paul by these converts. The noun εἶσοδος is difficult to capture fully in translation. In 2:1, it references Paul's coming to the city and his positive reception by those who became Christians. This broader meaning is what Paul means here by the word as well. Plus, the qualitative relative pronoun adjective ὅποίαν stresses a high value kind of reception of Paul. Then don't overlook the present tense verb ἔσχομεν stressing an ongoing posture. Their reception of Paul was not limited to just this initial visit. Notice the emphasis upon such a positive reception of him by those who formed the beginning Christian community. This stands in stark contrast to the abusive treatment of him and his team by the leaders of the Jewish synagogue that Luke describes in Acts 17:5-7.

Now what did the εῖσοδον of the Thessalonicans imply? Paul elaborates on one central point in the second main clause of this compound sentence:

πῶς ἐπεστρέψατε πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων, **how you turned to God from idols.** This is the core aspect of conversion. In v. 4, Paul referenced τὴν ἐκλογὴν ὑμῶν, **your election.** Then in v. 5, he elaborated on what this meant for the Thessalonians in terms of the spiritual transforming of the Gospel message upon them in their choosing to accept the message. Now in v. 9b another depiction of this moment is given in terms of turning from idols to God. The aorist verb ἐπιστρέψατε beautifully captures the essence of conversion as a turning to God while turning away from idols. It is not just turning to God, but is also a turning away from something. The verb ἐπιστρέφω emphasizes a genuine lifestyle turning. If shallow, or superficial, it is not a ἐπιστρέφω.

Coming out of this 'turning' is serving and waiting: δουλεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ καὶ ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, **in order to serve the living and true God and to await His Son out of heaven.** The twin purpose clauses, both in the present tense participle forms,

stress that coming out of the turning is both serving and waiting. The turning of the Thessalonicans to God meant δουλεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι καὶ ἀληθινῷ, **in order to be serving the living and true God.** Converted to serve -- this is the heart of the Gospel message as Paul both lived it and preached it (cf. Gal. 1:15-17).

But also this turning produces καὶ ἀναμένειν τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, **and to await His Son out of Heaven.** Quite interestingly, Paul does not use the common terms for expecting the return of Christ.⁷⁶ Rather he chooses a one time NT use word, ἀναμένω. The meaning is rather similar to the more common ἀπεκδέχεσθαι, but it draws attention to itself. One will note the anticipatory nature of Paul's reference here, which will be treated in greater detail in 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; and 5:1-11. Being ready for Christ's coming means serving God day in and day out, not retiring to some mountain top to look for Him in the sky.

Notice that **This One who is coming out of Heaven** is also ὃν ἥγειρεν ἐκ [τῶν] νεκρῶν, **Ἰησοῦν τὸν ρύμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ὄργης τῆς ἐρχομένης, Whom He raised from the dead, Jesus the One rescuing us from the coming wrath.** This rounds out the message of the Gospel preached at Thessalonica and that the folks there accepted. Jesus is coming because He was raised from the dead. His mission is rescuing His people of the coming wrath of God in judgment at the end of times. This wrath is already being poured out (cf. Rom. 1:18) but will come in full force at the end (Rom. 2:5, 16).

In this glowing tribute to the faith of the Thessalonican believers, Paul also inserts expansion elements that give signal of themes to come in the letter body. Thus from the Proem we glean insight into the essential content of this letter.

9.2.3 Letter Body

How Paul develops the content of the body of each of his letters is dictated by the needs of the readers more than anything else. There is no 'set pattern' such as doctrine/practical divisions, as is commonly asserted. The apostle was a much too skilled letter composer to fall into such a repetitive trap as this. Thus each letter body must be analyzed on its own merits; none fit into some kind of mold at the letter body part.

How does one then go about analyzing the content in order to determine its thought flow? Let me suggest a rather simple but fundamentally accurate way to do this, especially for readers unable to read

⁷⁶For a listing see topics 25.59-25.64 on **Hope, Look Forward to** in Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996. These are 25.59 ἐλπίζω^a; ἐλπίς^a, ἴδος; 25.60 προελπίζω; 25.61 ἐλπίς^b, ἴδος; 25.62 ἐλπίς^c, ἴδος; 25.63 ἀπειδέχομαι^a; 25.64 ἀποκαραδοκία, ας.

and [diagram the Greek text](#). Go through at least three or four translations of the text which have both paragraph divisions and section headings. Don't read just one; that's more harmful than helpful. Most translations are available online and a majority of the web sites will preserve both the paragraph and section heading in their online digital copy of the translation.⁷⁷ But one hast to be cautious here. A few, e.g., Bible Study Tools, only contain the embedded paragraph markers which are visible on the display screen. Others such as Bible Gateway have each verse formatted separately, which makes this kind of analysis impossible.

Make notes on the text divisions contained in such a comparative study. Note how this works for 1 Thess. 2:1-5:22, the letter body.

NRSV	Zürcher Bibel	NLT	LBLA
2:1-16	2.1-12	2:1-16	2.1-12
2:17-3:5	2:13-16	2:17-3:13	2.13-20
3:6-13	2:17-20	4:1-12	3.1-10
4:1-12	3:1-13	4:13-5:11	4.1-4.12
4:13-5:11	4.1-12	5:12-22	5.1-11
5:12-22	4:13-18	5:1-11	5.12-22
		5:12-24	

The NRSV and NLT reflect an English speaking mindset, but the ZB is German and the LBLA is Spanish.⁷⁸ Clearly the English thought pattern is to group larger units together under a single heading, while the other two are more oriented toward smaller units in each section. Notice, however, the points where larger agreement on thought shifts occur: 2:16; 3:13; 4:13; 5:11. These would function as a helpful starting point in analyzing places where topic shifts take place.

But it is helpful to note the paragraph divisions as

⁷⁷A very helpful additional step would be to create a document file in the landscape formal with four columns. Copy and paste from the internet source each of the four translations into the created document. Probably some formatting ‘clean up’ work will be needed. But once these are created with your translations displayed side by side, you will be able to compare similarities and differences more effectively.

For detailed instructions -- and examples -- on how to do this, check out the “Analysis Paper” assignment, especially [Phase One Assignment](#), in [Religion 102](#) at Gardner-Webb University. This was an exegesis paper assignment required of all undergraduates taking the required Religion 102, New Testament Introduction, course during the time I taught there from 1998 to 2008. Most of the freshmen Bible class students thought this was too complex for them but upon getting into it, the Bible study patterns for many of the students was transformed forever. And studying the Bible became a real joy now that they had some knowledge of how to go about doing it productively. Remember that these R102 students are eighteen and nineteen year old teenagers fresh out of high school and many with very minimal background in Christianity. If they can do it, I’m confident you can also.

⁷⁸What are included in the table are the section heading divisions of text. Most have multiple paragraphs inside each heading.

well:⁷⁹

NRSV	Zürcher Bibel	NLT	LBLA
2:1-16	2.1-12	2:1-16	2.1-12
¶ 2.1-8	¶ 2.1-4	¶ 2.1-3	¶ 2.1-12
¶ 2.9-12	¶ 2.5-9	¶ 2.4-6	2.13-20
¶ 2:13-16	¶ 2.10-12	¶ 2.7-8	¶ 2.13-16
2:17-3:5	2:13-16	¶ 2.9-12	¶ 2.17-20
¶ 2.17-20	¶ 2.13-16	¶ 2.13	3.1-10
¶ 3.1-5	2:17-20	¶ 2.14-16	¶ 3.1-10
3:6-13	¶ 2.17-20	2:17-3:13	3.11-13
¶ 3.6-10	3:1-13	¶ 2.17-20	¶ 3.11-13
¶ 3.11-13	¶ 3.1-5	¶ 3.1-5	4.1-4.12
4:1-12	¶ 3.6-10	¶ 3.6-8	¶ 4.1-8
¶ 4.1-8	¶ 3.11-13	¶ 3.9-10	¶ 4.9-12
¶ 4.9-12	4.1-12	¶ 3.11-13	4.13-18
4:13-5:11	¶ 4.1-2	4:1-12	¶ 4.13-18
¶ 4.13-18	¶ 4.3-8	¶ 4.1-2	5.1-11
¶ 5.1-11	¶ 4.9-12	¶ 4.3-8	¶ 5.1-11
5:12-22	4:13-18	¶ 4.9-10	5.12-22
	¶ 5.12-22	¶ 4.13	¶ 5.12-22
		¶ 4.14-17	4:13-5:11
		¶ 4.18	¶ 4.13-14
		5:1-11	¶ 4.15-18
		¶ 5.1-3	¶ 5.1-3
		¶ 5.4-10	¶ 5.4-8
		¶ 5.11	¶ 5.9-11
		5:12-24	5:12-22
		¶ 5.12-13	¶ 5.12-13
		¶ 5.14-15	¶ 5.14
		¶ 5.16	¶ 5.15
		¶ 5.17	¶ 5.16-18
		¶ 5.18	¶ 5.19-22
		¶ 5.19	
		¶ 5.20	
		¶ 5.21	
		¶ 5.22	
		¶ 5.23-24	

Once again the paragraph divisions will generally reflect the thought patterns common to each language. But one can note numerous places where the breaks intersect one another across most or all of the languages. There are helpful signals for shift in the thought flow in the underlying Greek text.

To be clear, ancient writers did not employ paragraph divisions in their compositions. The earliest manuscripts of the NT, for example, were written in uncial script with no spacing or punctuation marks at all. Uncial script somewhat compares to modern western printed capital letters only. Such markers of thought units as paragraphing do not show up until much later in the history of literary compositions in western society. But they unquestionably did create small units of thought expression and often followed one of the many established ways of linking these together. These could include coordinate conjunctions such as *καὶ*, *οὐ*, *ὅτε* etc. indicating that the second unit was linked to the

⁷⁹The LBLA unfortunately lists each verse separately in screen display, but does contain the paragraph marker symbol ¶ to signal a new paragraph.

preceding one as reason, implication, consequence etc. Additionally words in the grammar category of corroborative adverbs such οὗτως could achieve a connecting role between units. A particularly Hebrew oriented pattern found some in the NT is the use of linking ‘headers.’ For example in James 1:2-8 the two subunits of vv. 2-4 and 5-8 are linked together by λειπόμενοι, *lacking* at the end of v. 4 and λείπεται, *lacks* at the beginning of v. 5.

What then do paragraph divisions represent? Two basic things. First, they signal the attempt of the Bible translators to identify the ‘built-in’ sub units of text materials. With this being an interpretive issue, differences of understanding will inevitably surface from translation to translation. But as you utilize this skill of marking off units from comparison of translation paragraphing, you will discover an amazing amount of uniformity across different translations, especially when the translations are of the same language. Second, paragraph units are culturally conditioned. British writers have a different view about setting up paragraphs than do American writers. German paragraphing is very different than either British or American patterns. Translators by necessity must give due consideration to guidelines for paragraphing in the receptor language in which they are working. This since their goal in translating is clear, understandable expression of the Bible text in the receptor language.

Now a listing of the section headings from specific translations for each text unit will suggest possible themes for each section:

NRSV: **ZB:** **NLT:** **LBLA:**

Paul’s Ministry in Thessalonica (2:1-16)

Erinnerung an den Anfang (2:1-12)

Annahme des Evangeliums in Bedrängnis (2:13-16)

Paul Remembers His Visit (2:1-16)

Comportamiento de Pablo como ministro de Jesucristo (2:1-12)

Pablo da gracias por los tesoros ionenses (2:13-20)

Interés de Pablo por sus hijos en la fe (3:1-10)

Paul’s Desire to Visit the Thessalonians Again (2:17-3:5)

Sehnsucht des Paulus nach seiner Gemeinde (2:17-20)

Gute Nachrichten aus Thessalonich (3:1-13)

Timothy’s Good Report about the Church (2:17-3:13)

Timothy’s Encouraging Report (3:6-13)

A Life Pleasing to God (4:1-12)

Leben im Glauben (4:1-12)

Live to Please God (4:1-12)

NRSV: **ZB:** **NLT:** **LBLA:**

Exhortación a la santidad (3:11-4:12)

The Coming of the Lord (4:13-5:11)

Die Toten in Christus (4:13-18)

Leben im Vorschein der Zukunft (5:1-11)

The Hope of the Resurrection (4:13-5:11)

La venida del Señor (4:13-18)

Preparados para el día del Señor (5:1-11)

Final Exhortations, Greetings, and Benediction (5:12-28)

Das Zusammenleben in der Gemeinde (5:12-24)

Paul’s Final Advice (5:12-22)

Deberes prácticos de la vida cristiana (5:13-22)

A careful comparison of these headings reveals that just as he signaled in both the Praescriptio and especially in the Proem, three or four themes will dominate the body proper of the letter. First he elaborates upon the ὅποιαν εἴσοδον ἔσχομεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς (1:9) in 2:1-16. This leads to an expression of his desire to return to Thessalonica (2:17-20) but since this is not possible at the moment, he decided to send Timothy and probably Silas to the church (3:1-5). But now Timothy has returned to Athens with an excellent report on things (3:6-10). This encourages Paul greatly about the church (3:11-13).

He turns to some exhortations to pass on to the church in 4:1-12. Then the topic of the Lord’s return is mentioned in 4:13-18 which prompts the encouragement to be prepared in 5:1-11. Then 5:12-22 closes out the body of the letter with admonitions on taking care of their leaders, living the Christian life fully, and in being prepared for the Lord’s coming.

The content then of the letter body is a mixture of looking back in personal terms, dealing with the connections of Timothy and Silas to the church presently, and then looking forward to the Lord’s coming again. These are woven together in a delightful manner. And they reflect the signals given in the beginning sections.

This letter was much easier for Paul to compose in Athens than Galatians was at Philippi several months earlier!

9.2.4 Conclusio

The precise boundaries for the *Conclusio* are not as clear in this letter as in others. Clearly by 5:23 the *Conclusio* has begun. Some commentators, however, are inclined to include 5:12-22 in the *Conclusio* as well. But this unit of paraenesis material centers on taking care of spiritual leaders who faithfully discharge their duties

of giving proper leadership to the house churches in the city. These areas of leadership become general principles of Christian living in vv. 14-22. Such materials are not part of an ancient letter *Conclusio*. Instead they often come at the end of the letter body, especially in Paul's letters.

Additionally, a difference of opinion surfaces over 5:23-24. This prayer wish somewhat parallels the one in 3:11-13 standing at the end of a major unit of material in chapters two and three. A case can be made then for 5:23-24 functioning in the same role for the material in chapters four and five which begin with Λουτόν, *Finally*, in 4:1. Although this view has merits, the alternative of seeing the beginning of the *Conclusio* in 5:23 is more attractive as a general prayer wish signaling the closing of the letter.

Thus the more formal elements of the *Conclusio* begin with 5:23 and continue to the end of the letter in v. 28. Several elements often found in the *Conclusia* of Paul's letters surface here.

Prayer wish, for the congregation, vv. 23-24.

Two prayer desires⁸⁰ are expressed by the apostle for the Thessalonians. **First**, Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ Θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγίασαι ὑμᾶς ὄλοτελεῖς, *And may the God of peace Himself make you completely holy*. To be sure, some similarity exists with the opening of the prayer wish in 3:11, Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ Θεὸς καὶ πατήρ ἡμῶν καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς κατευθύναι τὴν ὄδον ἡμῶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, *And may God even our Father Himself and our Lord Jesus direct our path to you*. But as is readily noticeable, significantly different emphases are present as well. The phrase 'God of peace' is somewhat common in the Pauline letters; cf. Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:16. Note 2 Cor. 13:11 for a slight variation: ὁ Θεὸς τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ εἰρήνης, *the God of love and peace*. These rather set forms consistently introduce prayer wishes in Paul's writings. The prayer wish itself centers on holiness being established in the lives of the Thessalonians: ἀγίασαι ὑμᾶς ὄλοτελεῖς, *make you holy completely*. A somewhat similar emphasis is in the second prayer wish of 3:13, but with a slightly different twist: εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας ἀμέμπτους ἐν ἀγιωσύνῃ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἀγίων αὐτοῦ, [ἀμήν]. *And may He so strengthen your*

⁸⁰^cHere, as there, the optatives are in the aorist tense. The 'complexive' aorist is regularly used in prayers (BDF §337[4]). In direct prayers the aorist imperative is used; in a wish-prayer the imperative is replaced by the optative, but the aorist remains. That is sufficient explanation of the aorist ἀγίασαι but it is clear from the context that, if ἀγίαζειν is a process, it is the completion of the process that is in view here, as in 3:13. The importance of sanctification (ἀγιασμός) in the practical area of sexual life has been emphasized in 4:3, 4, 7, where it is implied that sanctification (in all areas of life) is the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit (4:8)." [F. F. Bruce, *I and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 129.]

hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. The purpose infinitive εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι sees the objective of strengthening the resolve (ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας) of the Thessalonians in holiness as the outgrowth of their abounding in love for the brothers (v. 12).

But in 5:23 the general wish is for God to complete the process begun in conversion of completely⁸¹ setting apart from the world the believers in the city.

Second, the next prayer wish grows out of the first one: καὶ ὄλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ τηρηθείη, *and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The interior of a person is defined within the standard Jewish and also the somewhat standard Greco-Roman dualistic perspective of τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, *spirit and soul*.⁸² To the interior designations is then added the exterior reference of τὸ σῶμα, *the body*. All together they become Paul's wish for this process of sanctification to envelope the entirety of the life of each Thessalonian.⁸³

⁸¹^cThis is the only place in the NT where ὄλοτελής occurs. Its earliest attestation is in Aristotle (Plant 1.2.20.817b). Vettius Valens uses it (Anth. 247.8), but an instance closer in date to ours comes in an inscription recording Nero's announcement of "complete exemption from taxation" (ἀνεισφορίαν ... ὄλοτελῆ) to all Greeks at the Isthmian Games of A.D. 67 (SIG3 814.45; IG 7.2713.45)." [F. F. Bruce, *I and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 129.]

⁸²^cPlato speaks of the mind as being in the soul, and the soul in the body (νοῦν μὲν ἐν ψυχῇ, ψυχὴν δὲ ἐν σώματι, Tim. 30B), but for him the νοῦς was part of the ψυχή. Marcus Aurelius distinguishes σῶμα, ψυχή, νοῦς by saying that sensations belong to the body, impulses to the soul and opinions to the mind (σώματος αἰσθήσεις, ψυχῆς ὄρματι, νοῦ δόγματα, Med. 3.16). MM (s.v. ὄλόκληρος) quote from the third-century magic P Lond 121, line 590, διαφύλασσέ μου τὸ σῶμα τὴν ψυχὴν ὄλόκληρον, 'keep my body [and] my soul in sound health.' These are partial parallels to the present terminology, but throw little light on its details: what the writers mean is, 'May every part of you be kept entirely without fault.' On the 'complexive' aorist optative τηρηθείη cf. what is said on ἀγίασαι earlier in the verse." [F. F. Bruce, *I and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 130.]

⁸³It is not legitimate to conclude a tripartite doctrine of human nature from this single listing in the entire NT. Paul is stressing complete inclusiveness of one's life in this set of terms.

It is precarious to try to construct a tripartite doctrine of human nature on the juxtaposition of the three nouns, πνεῦμα, ψυχὴ and σῶμα. The three together give further emphasis to the completeness of sanctification for which the writers pray, but the three together add but little to the sense of ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας ("your hearts") in 3:13. The distinction between the bodily and spiritual aspects of human nature is easily made, but to make a comparable distinction between "spirit" and "soul" is forced. Few would care to distinguish sharply among the four elements "heart" (καρδία), "soul" (ψυχή), "mind" (διάνοια) and "strength" (ἰσχύς) of Mark 12:30

Interestingly, the term of inclusiveness in this prayer, ὄλοκληρον, matches its parallel term ὄλοτελεῖς in the first prayer and they are placed back to back to each other for heightened emphasis.

Just as in 3:13, the ultimate objective is ἀμέμπτους ἐν ἀγιωσύνῃ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἀγίων αὐτοῦ, [ἀμήν], **in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints**, here also the second coming of Christ is in view: ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ τηρηθείη, **blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will be kept**. Paul's deep concern was that when the Thessalonians stood before Christ in final judgment there would not be any point of divine criticism about how they had lived the Christian life.

The twin prayer wish then is concluded with the affirmation that God will enable the Thessalonians to stand before Christ in blamelessness: πιστὸς ὁ καλῶν ὑμᾶς, ὅς καὶ ποιήσει, **Faithful is the One calling you, Who also will do it**. What a positive note to conclude with! Compare also Phil. 1:6, πεποιθώς αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ὅτι ὁ ἐναρξάμενος ἐν ὑμῖν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐπιτελέσει ἄχρι ἡμέρας Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

Prayer request for the apostle, v. 25. Άδελφοι, προσεύχεσθε [καὶ] περὶ ἡμῶν. **Brothers, be praying also for us**. Paul's indication of what he is praying for the Thessalonians about is then followed by a request for the Thessalonians to be praying for him, Timothy, and Silas in their ministry. Requests for prayer by Paul to his readers is common place in his letters: Rom 15:30–32; 2 Cor 1:11; Eph 6:19, 20; Phil 1:19; Col 4:3, 18; Phlm 22. Note the present tense imperative verb form προσεύχεσθε which asks for ongoing prayers, rather than a one time action.

(amplifying the threefold “heart, ... soul, and ... might” of Deut 6:5). The distinction made by Paul between ψυχή and πνεῦμα in 1 Cor 15:45 has no bearing on the present passage: there the distinction lies between the “living person” (ψυχὴ ζῶσα) which the first Adam became at his creation (Gen 2:7) and the “life-giving spirit” (πνεῦμα ζωτοποιοῦν) which the second Adam has become in resurrection. It is the contrast between the two nouns in that sense that constitutes the contrast between the adjectives ψυχικός and πνευματικός in 1 Cor 15:44, 46 (ψυχικός means χοϊκός as πνευματικός means ἐπουράνιος). The contrast between ψυχικός and πνευματικός in 1 Cor 2:14, 15 depends on the contrast between the soul of man and the Spirit of God; the understanding of the ψυχικὸς ἀνθρώπος is confined to the capacity of “the spirit of man (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) within him” (1 Cor 2:11), and without the indwelling Spirit of God he cannot appreciate the πνευματικά, the “things of God” (1 Cor 2:11). In that context πνεῦμα is practically synonymous with νοῦς (cf. 1 Cor 2:16).

[F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 130.]

Greetings to the brothers, v. 26. Άσπάσασθε τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς πάντας ἐν φιλήματι ἀγίῳ. **Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss**. A kiss on the cheek was standard greeting among friends in the first century world, as is still the tradition in most modern European countries.⁸⁴ What made such a greeting ‘holy’ ἀγίῳ was that it was done in the name of Christ as an expression of brotherly love.⁸⁵

One interesting possibility here is the possible Lord's Supper setting implied in this admonition.⁸⁶ Clearly by the middle of the second century this was the case for Christians gathered together. Although a few of the NT passages with the ‘holy kiss’ mentioned do suggest a Lord's Supper setting, it is not possible to conclude this strongly until one is well into the second century. And then, how long such a practice had exist-

⁸⁴ Shaking hands as a gesture of greeting is the option with those whom one has not yet established a formal friendship with. In my personal experience of living in Germany, France, and Costa Rica, I have found this to be true. Yet the ‘kiss’ differs from culture to culture. There's a slightly different greeting kiss in all three cultures.

⁸⁵ Practically the same injunction appears in Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12. In 1 Pet 5:14 the same kiss is called the ‘kiss of love’ (φίλημα ἀγάπης); later it was generally called the ‘kiss of peace’ (cf. Hippolytus, Ap. Trad. 4.1; 18.3; 22.6). The *Apostolic Constitutions* (early 4th century) lay it down that at the Eucharist “the men are to give one another the kiss in the Lord (τὸ ἐν κυρίῳ φίλημα) and the women likewise to one another” (2.57.17).” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 134.]

⁸⁶ The direction regarding the ‘holy kiss’ in v 26 suggests a eucharistic setting. The exchange of the kiss in such a setting is attested by Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 150): it came after the prayers and before the bringing in of the bread and wine (Justin, Apol. 65.2). The omission of the kiss of greeting even at an ordinary social meal was an occasion for remark (Luke 7:45); it was the more appropriate that it should feature in the meal where those in the fellowship of the reconciled celebrated the one whose reconciling sacrifice had united them.

“It may well be that the writers envisage the letter being read at a eucharistic assembly of the church—after the prayers, perhaps, and just before the normal moment for the exchanged kiss. This would not be an isolated instance among the Pauline letters: at the end of 1 Cor (16:20–22) the direction to ‘greet one another with a holy kiss’ is followed by the quotation of some words from the eucharistic service. ‘If we may regard the closing verses of 1 Corinthians as a lead-in to the Lord's Supper, we can draw the conclusion that the Supper was introduced by the kiss of peace as a sign of loving fellowship among the members. This was accompanied both by the pronouncement of a curse upon any who did not truly love the Lord and by the pronouncement of a blessing upon the Lord's people’ (Marshall, Last Supper and Lord's Supper, 145). (In the light of this, a comparison of Marana-tha in 1 Cor 16:22 with ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ, ‘Come, Lord Jesus’ in Rev 22:20 may suggest that the Apocalypse similarly was read at eucharistic assemblies of the churches of Asia to which it was sent.)” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 133–134.]

ed is not indicated by any of these church father texts.

Apostolic admonition for the reading of the letter, v. 27. Ἐνορκίζω ὑμᾶς τὸν κύριον ἀναγνωσθῆναι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς. *I solemnly command you by the Lord that this letter be read to all of the brothers.* In this, Paul expresses his desire that this letter be read to all of the house church groups in and around the city of Thessalonica. The shift from the plural verb forms, we / you, to the first person singular I most likely signals that the apostle has taken over the writing of the *Conclusio* as his letter validation indication.⁸⁷

The use of the verb Ἐνορκίζω, *I solemnly command*, is rare; this is the sole NT usage.⁸⁸ The alternative form ὄρκίζειν is somewhat more frequent with four NT uses. The sense of Ἐνορκίζω is to demand that another person pledge to do something under oath.⁸⁹ Paul is not

⁸⁷^cThe sudden switch from the plural to the singular of the first person is significant; the most probable explanation is that Paul took over the pen at this point and added the adjuration and the concluding benediction with his own hand (cf. Askwith, “‘I’ and ‘we’ ...”). Earlier instances of Paul’s interposing something on his own account have come at 2:18 and 3:5 (see also 2 Thess 2:5 and especially 3:17, with comment).” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 135.]

⁸⁸It is a part of a word group: ὄρκος, ὄρκίζω, ὄρκωμοσία, Ἐνορκίζω, ἔξορκίζω (ἔξορκιστής), ἐπίορκος, ἐπιορκέω. Also included is ὄμνυώ. These have to do with the making and implementing of oaths, something very significant to first century society both Jewish, and also Greco-Roman.

⁸⁹**33.467 ὄρκίζω; Ἐνορκίζω; ἔξορκίζω:** to demand that a person take an oath as to the truth of what is said or as to the certainty that one will carry out the request or command—‘to put under oath, to insist that one take an oath, to require that one swear.’⁷⁷ ὄρκίζω: ὄρκίζω σε τὸν θεόν, μή με βασανίσῃς ‘I ask you to swear by the name of God that you will not punish me’ Mk 5:7.

“Ἐνορκίζω: Ἐνορκίζω ὑμᾶς τὸν κύριον ἀναγνωσθῆναι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ‘I ask you to swear by the name of the Lord to read this letter to all the Christian brothers’ 1 Th 5:27.

“ἔξορκίζω: ἔξορκίζω σε κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος ἵνα ἡμῖν εἴπης εἰ σὺ εἶ ‘I charge you to swear in the name of the living God to tell us who you are’ Mt 26:63.

“It is extremely difficult to translate ὄρκίζω, Ἐνορκίζω, and ἔξορκίζω in a literal manner, though in some contexts one can say ‘I put you under oath,’ but in a number of passages the person speaking is imploring and not necessarily in a position to command or insist. Therefore, in a passage such as Mk 5:7, one may render the meaning idiomatically as ‘for God’s sake, I ask you, do not punish me.’ In 1 Th 5:27 one may translate ‘in the name of the Lord, I ask you to read this letter to all the Christian brothers,’ and in Mt 26:63 one may translate ‘in the name of the living God, I charge you, Tell us who you are.’

“In most languages one may translate ὄρκίζω, Ἐνορκίζω, and ἔξορκίζω by simply adding a causative component to terms meaning ‘to swear’ or ‘to take an oath.’ In other words, ὄρκίζω, Ἐνορκίζω, and ἔξορκίζω may be rendered as ‘to cause a person to say under oath.’”

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 1:440–441.]

here ignoring Jesus’ teaching on oath making, just the modern misunderstanding of that teaching.⁹⁰

What lies behind this solemn expression is not known beyond the simple implication of a fear that it would not be read to everyone in the Christian community. But as one might expect, commentator speculation at this point runs rampant with wild, baseless guesses.⁹¹ The indirect object τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς, *to the brothers*, simply means the entire community that was composed of all of the house church groups. The infinitive phrase ἀναγνωσθῆναι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν, *this letter be read*, underscores the responsibility of the local leaders of the various house church groups to make arrangements for those who brought the letter to Thessalonica, most likely Timothy and Silas, to have opportunity to meet with each of these groups in order to not just read the letter to them, but also to answer questions about it from members of each group.

The closest expression to this admonition in v. 27 comes in the *Conclusio* of a letter of Paul well over a decade later in Col. 4:16, καὶ ὅταν ἀναγνωσθῇ παρ’ ὑμῖν ἡ ἐπιστολή, ποιήσατε ἵνα καὶ ἐν τῇ Λαοδικέων ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀναγνωσθῇ, καὶ τὴν ἐκ Λαοδικείας ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀναγνῶτε.

⁹⁰Paul’s use of the adjuration need not imply that he was unaware of Jesus’ ban on the use of oaths by his followers (μὴ ὁμόσαι ὅλως, Matt 5:34); this is not a strengthening of a statement of his own by the invocation of the divine name (for which cf. 2:5; Gal 1:20; Rom 9:1; Phil 1:8) but an appeal to those addressed to act in this matter as responsible to the Lord himself.

“But why should he insist so solemnly that ‘the letter’ (i.e. the letter now being concluded) should be read to ‘all the brothers?’ It sounds very much as though he feared that some Thessalonian Christians might not have it communicated to them.” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 135.=

⁹¹It is difficult to accept Harnack’s theory that the Gentile and Jewish Christians of Thessalonica met separately and that, while the letter was sent to the Gentile group, Paul wished to make sure that the Jewish group should read it too (see Introduction). Ellis (“Paul and his Co-Workers,” 451 n. 1) suggests that the ‘brothers’ here may be Paul’s co-workers, ‘especially those evangelizing a neighbouring area,’ who ‘might not hear a letter sent to the congregation and yet might have need of its teachings for their own work.’ It is more likely that such ‘co-workers’ would be the first to receive the letter and that it would be their responsibility to make sure that it was read to ‘all the brothers’ (cf. Masson, ad loc., for the view that the primary recipients were the προϊστάμενοι). It is best, on the whole, to conclude that Paul wished to make sure that the ἄτακτοι heard the letter. There was much in it that would be especially beneficial for them, but if their ἀταξία included a tendency to absent themselves from meetings of the church (cf. Heb 10:25), they might not be present when the letter was read; the responsible leaders of the church should therefore see to it that they were made acquainted with its contents. For a direction about the reading of other Pauline letters cf. Col 4:16. The ‘reading’ implied is public reading at a meeting of the whole church.” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 135.]

And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea.⁹² The letter to the Colossians is to be read not just to the house church groups in Colossae, but also in nearby Laodicea as well. Likewise an unknown letter to the Laodiceans is to be read at Colossae as well.

What does emerge from this admonition of Paul at the end of his letter is a picture of how he desires his letters to be treated upon arrival at their designation. No leader or particular house church group is to hoard the document as though it pertained only to them. Instead, the leaders are solemnly charged to make arrangements among all of the house church groups in the city for a gathering of each group so that the one bringing the letter to the city can both read it and be available to answer any questions that may arise from the contents of the letter. Only in communicating the contents of the letter in this manner can Timothy and Silas gain first hand awareness of the individual situation of each of these groups, which will form the basis of their report back to Paul once they return to Achaia. In this instance, they will catch up with Paul in Corinth and report some issues to him that emerged in the reading of the letter to the different groups. This then forms the basis for the composition of the second letter to the church in Thessalonica. Only after this task is completed can any thought be given to making copies of the document so that each group can have an individual copy for their own use.

Benedictio, v. 28. Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.* Numerous manuscripts add the liturgical ἀμήν, *amen*, after the prayer: αμην κ A D¹ Ψ 1739^c M lat sy bo. But the weight of manuscript evidence favors omitting it: B D* F G 0278. 6. 33. 1739*. 1881 pc it vg^{mss} sa; Ambst.⁹³

Just as χάρις helped set the tone for the letter in

⁹²Somewhat related but also very different in thrust is the warning in the *Conclusio* of Rev. 22:18-19. This warning follows a relatively common warning found in many of the Jewish apocalypses, and thus is significantly different than the admonition in 1 Thess. 5:27.

18 Μαρτυρῶ ἐγὼ παντὶ τῷ ἀκούοντι τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου· ἔάν τις ἐπιθῆ ἐπ’ αὐτά, ἐπιθήσει ὁ θεὸς ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τὰς πληγὰς τὰς γεγραμμένας ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ, 19 καὶ ἔάν τις ἀφέλῃ ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης, ἀφελεῖ ὁ θεὸς τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ἐκ τῆς πόλεως τῆς ἀγίας τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ.

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; 19 if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

⁹³Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 538.

the Salutatio in 1:1, it becomes the final prayer tone at the end of the letter with this prayer of benediction. Additionally, the letter opens with the Proem Prayer of Thanksgiving in 1:2-10 and then closes with the Prayer of Benediction at the end. These structures were not accidental, but rather planned out by Paul. And they served as a model for virtually all of *his letters* over the next twelve to fourteen years of writing letters.

This particular benedictory prayer of Paul's is among the shortest, as the listing below of all of his letters illustrates.

Gal. 6:18,

Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί· ἀμήν.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

1 Thess. 5:28,

Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you

2 Thess. 3:18,

Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

1 Cor. 16:23-24,

23 ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν.

24 ἡ ἀγάπη μου μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24 My love be with all of you in Christ Jesus.

2 Cor. 13:13,

Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἀγίου πνεύματος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Rom. 16:25-27,

25 Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ ὑμᾶς στηρίξαι κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν μυστηρίου χρόνοις αἰώνιοις σεσιγημένου, 26 φανερωθέντος δὲ νῦν διά τε γραφῶν προφητικῶν κατ’ ἐπιταγὴν τοῦ αἰώνιου Θεοῦ εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη γνωρισθέντος, 27 μόνῳ σοφῷ Θεῷ, διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὃ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰώνας, ἀμήν.

25 Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26 but is now disclosed, and through



the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

Philm. 25, Ή χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Col. 4:18, ή χάρις μεθ' ὑμῶν.

Grace be with you.

Eph. 6:24, ή χάρις μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἀγαπώντων τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ.

Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Phil. 4:23, Ή χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

1 Tim. 6:21, Ή χάρις μεθ' ὑμῶν.

Grace be with you.

2 Tim. 4:22, Ό κύριος μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματός σου. ή χάρις μεθ' ὑμῶν.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Titus 3:15, Ή χάρις μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν.

Grace be with all of you.

In modelling the pattern followed in the Christian gatherings in the house church meetings, his letter opens with a prayer and closes with a prayer. Both prayers have formal, liturgical tones that reflect the pat-

tern of worship in these gatherings. The *Benedictio* of early Christian use reflected the *Benedictio* usage in the Jewish synagogue gatherings on Friday evenings.⁹⁴

What we therefore can see from the *Conclusio* is the further development of a formula for a letter closing that, while including some elements standard in the usual *Conclusio* of ancient letters, will become uniquely Pauline by the writing of the final letter in the mid 60s. The apostle had learned out of his schooling both in Tarsus and Jerusalem how to communicate with a readership, and how to do it both within existing frameworks and at the same time while being distinctly creative.

In summary, First Thessalonians comes as one of the earliest expressions of Paul as an author of written materials. After the challenging task of writing a strong criticism of the Christians in the churches of Galatian, the joy of writing to a congregation with virtually no issues and problems must have been substantial to him. Even though his time in the city on the second missionary journey had been difficult with the vicious opposition of the Jewish synagogue leadership, the Christian congregation born out of that tough experience became a real delight and pleasure for him. The repeated expressions of gratitude to God for this congregation reflect this posture of joy and thanksgiving first expressed in the Proem of the letter.



9.3 Second Thessalonians

The time between the writing of First and Second Thessalonians was not a long period. The most likely scenario is as follows.

Once Paul arrived in Athens (Acts 17:14-16), he was waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him there after they had remained behind in Beroea to do follow up work with the newly established Christian community. The distressing level of idolatry in Athens motivated him to promote the Gospel both in the Jewish synagogue and in the market place in the city.

⁹⁴For a helpful discussion of these prayers prior to 70 AD see David Instone Brewer, "The Eighteen Benedictions and the Minim before 70 CE," [Tyndale House](#), Cambridge University. This is a downloadable pdf file.

At some point during this stay in Athens both Timothy and Silas joined him with news from not just Beroea but also from Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:1-6).⁹⁵ The heart of their report was the continuing opposition being faced by the believers in Thessalonica, which concerned Paul. Consequently, First Thessalonians is composed in Athens with the help of Timothy and Silas, who are then dispatched back to Macedonia with this letter.

After delivery of the letter to the believers in Thessalonica and the spending of some time helping the believers both in the city and also in Philippi and Beroea, these two missionary assistants head back south to Achaia to catch up with Paul who by this time is into his lengthy 18 month ministry (v. 11) in Corinth (Acts 18:1-17). Timothy and Silas rejoin Paul there (v. 5) and bring him news regarding the advancement of the Gospel in Macedonia. The persecution against believers continues in Thessalonica (2 Thess. 1:3-12). Additionally, unresolved questions about the second coming of Christ were brought from the church to Paul by Timothy and Silas. These two central concerns will prompt the composition of this second letter to Thessalonica, which Silas and Timothy will deliver. After spending time in Macedonia delivering the second letter, they again rejoin Paul in Corinth sometime shortly before his departure from the city on his way to Antioch (Acts 18:18).⁹⁶

9.3.1 Praescriptio

1.1 Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, 2 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς

⁹⁵Phil. 4:15-16 carries possible implications of a ministry of Timothy and Silas at Philippi as well. Clearly it refers to the financial help given by the Phillipians as early as when Paul was in Thessalonica. And this ministry continued on while Paul was in Achaia. Luke references this in Acts 18:5 with the arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia.

⁹⁶More information about Timothy surfaces inside the NT than does about Silas. But after Timothy joined Paul and Silas on the second missionary journey (Acts 16), it wasn't long until he was often being dispatched by Paul especially to Macedonia. On the second missionary journey this happened from Achaia twice. On the third missionary journey, it happened from Asia (Acts 19:22). Also from Ephesus he was sent to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10). After Paul's arrest in Jerusalem at the end of the third missionary journey and until the end of Paul's earthly life, Timothy divided time between being with Paul where ever he was and being on assignment to some other place, as the Prison Letters and the Pastoral Letters abundantly testify to.

Silas -- called by Paul and Peter Σιλουανός, his Latin name, and either Σιλᾶς or Σιλᾶς, Silas, by Luke -- disappears from the biblical narrative in Acts after the second missionary journey, and the last Pauline reference is in 2 Cor. 1:9 on the third missionary journey. Whether Silas continued to serve with Paul after the mid 50s or not is not known. It could well be that he opted to continue ministry in and around Antioch which was home for him as Acts 15 signals. .

[ἡμῶν] καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

1.1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle follows the standard threefold structure of the Praescriptio:

Superscriptio: Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος, Paul and Silvanus and Timothy.

This matches exactly the Superscriptio in First Thessalonians: Παῦλος καὶ Σιλουανὸς καὶ Τιμόθεος (1:1). Thus the senders of letter are the same as with the first letter. The only difference is the circumstance for the sending of the letter. Now these three missionaries are in Corinth and the letter is a response to the report brought back by Timothy and Silas from their delivery of the first letter sent to the church from Athens about a year or so earlier.

Adscriptio: τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Again the Adscriptio is almost an exact copy of the one in the first letter: τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. The only difference is the insertion of ἡμῶν, our, in modification of θεῷ πατρὶ. The use of ἡμῶν brings this Adscriptio into conformity with the dominant pattern in the Pauline letters.

By this point the church had been in existence for well over a year and perhaps longer. Thus time had passed so that issues and concerns within the cluster of house church groups in the city could develop. As will be indicated in the letter Proem (see below), the church continued to mature in its spiritual commitment. But questions related to the second coming of Christ remained unanswered in the thinking of many of those in the church. Thus, this short letter will give major attention to the issues currently being discussed among the members at Thessalonica.

Salutatio: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς [ἡμῶν]⁹⁷ καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Interestingly the Salutatio here is longer than the one in First Thessalonians, just χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη. In this second letter the source of divine blessing is stated explicitly as ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς [ἡμῶν] καὶ κυρίου

⁹⁷Some copyists omit ἡμῶν in order to make it conform exactly to its parallel in First Thessalonians: B D P 0111^{vid.} 33. 1739. 1881 m bo^{pt}. But the weight of manuscript evidence favors its inclusion: κ A F G I K L 0278. 81. 104. 365. 630. 1175. 1241. 1505. 2464 M lat sy sa bo^{pt} [Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus*, ed. Barbara Aland et al., 28. revised Auflage. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 630.

Ίησοῦ Χριστοῦ, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Although implied in the first letter, here it is stated directly. Additionally, the phrase is almost exactly the same as is found in the Adscriptio: ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησῷ Χριστῷ. Although no direct reason is given for repeating this phrase so close to the first instance, the effect is heightened emphasis upon God and Christ as the ultimate sources of divine blessing upon the Thessalonians. This signals an emphasis that we as readers would expect to see expanded in some manner in the letter body. The use of this specification of divine source of blessing in the Salutatio of Paul's letters is quite common.⁹⁸

The combined reference to God and Christ on equal terms stresses the distinctly Christian perspective of Paul. Perhaps the emphasis here is connected to the reference to continued persecution of the believers in the city (cf. 1:5-10). At the heart of the Jewish synagogue opposition to the Christian community would have been both a denial of the divinity of Christ and an exclusive claim to possession of God as Father only by those in the synagogue.

9.3.2 Proem

3 Εὐχαριστεῖν ὄφείλομεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, καθὼς ἄξιόν ἔστιν, ὅτι ὑπεραυξάνει ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καὶ πλεονάζει ἡ ἀγάπη ἐνὸς ἐκάστου πάντων ὑμῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, 4 ὥστε αὐτοὺς ἡμᾶς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐγκαυχᾶσθαι ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑπομονῆς ὑμῶν καὶ πίστεως ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν καὶ ταῖς θλίψεσιν αἵς ἀνέχεσθε, 5 ἔνδειγμα τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὸ καταξιωθῆναι ὑμᾶς τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, ὑπὲρ ἣς καὶ πάσχετε, 6 εἴπερ δίκαιον παρὰ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι τοῖς θλίβουσιν ὑμᾶς θλῖψιν 7 καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς θλιβομένοις ἄνεσιν μεθ' ἡμῶν, ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ μετ' ἀγγέλων δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ 8 ἐν πυρὶ φλογός, διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν καὶ τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, 9 οἵτινες δίκην τίσουσιν ὅλεθρον αἰώνιον ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τῆς ἴσχύος αὐτοῦ, 10 ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐνδοξασθῆναι ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις αὐτοῦ καὶ θαυμασθῆναι ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύσασιν, ὅτι ἐπιστεύθη τὸ μαρτύριον ἡμῶν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς, ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ.

11 Εἰς ὁ καὶ προσευχόμεθα πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἵνα ὑμᾶς ἀξιώσῃ τῆς κλήσεως ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν καὶ πληρώσῃ πᾶσαν εὔδοκιαν ἀγαθωσύνης καὶ ἔργον πίστεως ἐν

⁹⁸“ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς [ἡμῶν] καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ‘from God [our] Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.’ These words, habitually appended to χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνῃ in the Pauline letters (cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2, with the omission of καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; Phlm 3; also, with minor variations, 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4), are missing from 1 Thess 1:1 (for a possible stylistic reason see comment ad loc.).” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 142.]

δυνάμει, 12 ὅπως ἐνδοξασθῇ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν αὐτῷ, κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

3 We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing. 4 Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring. 5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, and is intended to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering. 6 For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

11 To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the *Prayer of Thanksgiving* (vv. 3-10), Paul phrases the core expression in terms of compulsion with Εὐχαριστεῖν ὄφείλομεν τῷ θεῷ, we are compelled to give thanks to God. This is a slight modification⁹⁹ of the dominating pattern expressed either in the singular or plural form of the verb: Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ / Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ. The meaning among all three forms is essentially the same: the apostle expressed prayerful thanksgiving to God for his targeted readers.

What distinguishes each of these core expres-

⁹⁹“A certain formality has been detected in this language, by contrast with the warmth of 1 Thess 1:2 (εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν, ‘we give thanks to God always for all of you’), and used as an argument against the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians. But if the Thessalonian Christians had protested against what they regarded as the excessive commendation expressed in the earlier letter, the writers might well have replied, ‘It is only fitting that we should thank God for you; it is indeed our bounden duty’—and that is the force of the present wording (much of which is repeated in 2:13). The Thessalonians deserve all the thanksgiving with which the writers’ hearts are filled on their account, because of the encouragement brought by the news of their ever-increasing faith and love.” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 144.]

sions in Paul's letters is the expansion elements attached to either the verb or the direct object, τῷ θεῷ, **to God**.¹⁰⁰ Here a long string of modifying expansions are attached, mostly to the verb expression Εὐχαριστεῖν ὄφείλομεν:

a) πάντοτε, **always** (v. 3b).

This temporal adverb underscores the ongoing sense of obligation that Paul felt for giving thanks to God for the Thessalonians.¹⁰¹ They were consistent in obeying Christ and this generated an ongoing sense of thankfulness from Paul.

b) περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, **for you, brothers** (v. 3c).

The prepositional phrase περὶ ὑμῶν defines the reference point of his thanksgiving, the Thessalonians whom Paul calls ἀδελφοί. The generic use of the masculine gender here justifies the NRSV rendering of this as **brothers and sisters**. Contextually it is obvious that all of those in the house churches are included in this designation, and not just the men, nor just the leaders.

c) καθὼς ἄξιόν ἐστιν, **just as it is proper** (v. 3d).

This adverbial comparative clause compares this expression of thanksgiving to a standard Paul considered to be ἄξιόν. The sense of the adjective ἄξιος, -ία, -ον¹⁰² **of value or worth**, here moves in the direction of Paul's thanksgiving measuring up to a standard of propriety or correctness due to the circumstance of that thanksgiving. That is, the Thessalonians fully deserved such thanksgiving to God because of their track record of faithfulness to Him. He was then determine to express thanksgiving worthy of such commitment. This group of Christians was one of the few congregations that Paul could make such a claim about because of its shining record of faithful service.

d) ὅτι ὑπεραυξάνει ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καὶ πλεονάζει ἡ ἀγάπη ἐνὸς ἐκάστου πάντων ὑμῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, **because**

¹⁰⁰The Greek dative case is required here, rather than the accusative case, because of the personal object τῷ θεῷ.

¹⁰¹πάντοτε adv. (on the formation Schwyzer I 629) of time (Hellenist. and Mod. Gk.; Dionys. Hal.+; Peripl. Eryth. 29; Epict., Ench. 14, 1; Dio Chrys. 15 [32], 37; Herodian 3, 9, 8; Artem. 4, 20; Plut.; Athen.; Diog. L., OGI 458, 76 [I.B.C.], SIG 814, 37 [67 A.D.]; BGU 1123, 8 [II.B.C.]; PGiss 17, 4; 72, 11 [II.A.D.]; Wsd 11:21; 19:18; TestSol, Test12Patr; JosAs 7:6; SyrBar 12:2; Jos., Bell. 3, 42; Just., D. 49, 7; 93, 4; Ath., R. 1 p. 49, 1 al.—The Atticists preferred ἐκάστοτε, διαπαντός, or ὁσί [Phryn. 103 Lob.]) **always, at all times** Mt 26:11ab; Mk 14:7ab; Lk 15:31; 18:1; J 6:34; 7:6 (seven times in J); Ro 1:10; 1 Cor 1:4; 15:58; 2 Cor 2:14 (27 times in Paul); Hb 7:25 (not found in Ac and Cath. Epistles; B-D-F §105; cp. Rob. 300); Dg 11:4; IEph 4:2; Hv 1, 1, 7 (24 times in Hermas).—B. 984. DELG s.v. πᾶς. 35–41. M-M.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 755.]

¹⁰²The use of the neuter gender singular form of the adjective refers back to the preceding phrase, describing Paul's thanksgiving to God. .

your faith is flourishing and your love abounds each one of all of you for one another (v. 3e).

This causal dependent clause provides the basis for Paul's thanksgiving. Both their faith commitment to Christ and their love for one another were developing into mature expressions consistently in the life of the group. Two of the three traits mentioned in 1 Thess. 1:3 -- faith, love, hope -- find renewed expression here. This pair of faith / love stresses the foundational vertical / horizontal nature of the Christian religion which was inherited from Judaism. Both of these qualities are moving forward in a spiritually healthy fashion among the Thessalonians. The two verbs underscore this in terms of the unusually abundant growth of a plant, ὑπεραυξάνω, and the abundant accumulation of items of great value, πλεονάζω. The use of the present tense for both verbs stresses ongoing action rather than spasmodic or infrequent occurrence.

e) ὥστε αὐτοὺς ἡμᾶς ἐν ὑμῖν ἔγκαυχᾶσθαι ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑπομονῆς ὑμῶν καὶ πίστεως ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν καὶ ταῖς θλίψεσιν αἵς ἀνέχεσθε, **so that we ourselves are able to boast about you among the churches of God in regard to your steadfastness and faithfulness in all your persecutions and afflictions which you are enduring** (v. 4).

This adverbial result infinitive phrase underscores the impact for Paul of the thanksgiving he has 'fleshed' out in the preceding expansions. The core infinitive ἔγκαυχᾶσθαι from ἔγκαυχάμαι is a part of a word group -- καυχάμαι, καύχημα, καύχησις, ἔγκαυχάμαι, κατακαυχάμαι¹⁰³ -- that connotes the idea of deep personal satisfaction and fulfillment that can be, and often is, expressed to others. The compound form ἔγκαυχάμαι is only used here in the entire NT, which is in line with sparse usage in ancient Greek generally. Its meaning is virtually identical to the much more common καυχάμαι. Their faith is deeply satisfying to him.

Paul indicates his mentioning of the Thessalonians ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ θεοῦ, **among the churches of God**. Does this imply the passing of a lot of time between the founding of the church and the writing of this second letter? From the time of the establishment of the Christian community in Thessalonica to the writing of this letter was a period of no more than two or so years, and Paul's movements were confined to the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. Thus the intended reference here is confined to this geographical region and the number of Christian communities established in the core cities of Beroea, Athens, and Corinth.¹⁰⁴ Although

¹⁰³Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 3:645.

¹⁰⁴“Reference has been made already to ‘the churches of God’ (1 Thess 2:14), but those were the Judean churches, comprising Page 899

not emphasized in Luke's narrative in Acts, numerous references on the third missionary journey suggest strongly that these core cities began reaching out immediately to towns and villages surrounding them with new Christian communities being rapidly established. Thus within a two year span following this pattern quite a large number of Christian communities would have come into existence in these two provinces. Probably Paul visited at least some of them, given the numerous activities and movements by him that are not covered by Luke in the Acts narrative.

The labeling of these Christian communities as ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ Θεοῦ is particularly pointed to the mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish believers who were being opposed by the synagogues which themselves would have claimed this label as the 'gathering of God's people' as the label itself essentially means. It is a favorite label for Paul with 62 uses of ἐκκλησία in his letters.¹⁰⁵ The expanded label ἐκκλησίᾳ / ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ Θεοῦ shows up some 8 times in 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 2:14; 2 Thess. 1:4; 1 Tim. 3:15.

What the apostle takes great pride in regarding the Thessalonians is specified by the prepositional phrase ὑπὲρ τῆς ὑπομονῆς ὑμῶν καὶ πίστεως ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν καὶ ταῖς θλίψεσιν αἵς ἀνέχεσθε, in regard to your endurance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and the afflictions which you endure. The article noun + noun pattern of τῆς ὑπομονῆς καὶ πίστεως links the two traits

the mother church of Jerusalem and her daughter churches, formed either by evangelization or by dispersion. It is primarily the Jerusalem church that is meant by 'the church of God' which Paul in his earlier days persecuted (Gal 1:13; 1 Cor 15:9; cf. Phil 3:6). But now, with the advance of the gospel, other 'churches of God' have come into being — specially, from Paul's point of view, what he calls 'the churches of the Gentiles' (Rom 16:4). The believers in Corinth, for example, constitute 'the church of God which is at Corinth' (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; cf. 1 Cor 10:32; 11:22). The sum total of such local churches makes up 'the churches of God' in the sense intended here (cf. 1 Cor 11:16); they are also called 'the churches of Christ' (Rom 16:16) or 'the churches of the saints' (1 Cor 14:33). Mention is made of the church (singular) of a specified city (like Thessalonica) or the churches (plural) of a specified province (like Macedonia, 2 Cor 8:1). While the Christian use of ἐκκλησία was taken over from its LXX application to the religious community of Israel (see comment on 1 Thess 1:1), and was first current among the Jewish disciples in Jerusalem, it quickly became naturalized in the Gentile mission field, like most of the designations given to the OT people of God (see comment on v 10 below, ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις αὐτοῦ)." [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 145–146.]

¹⁰⁵But it is not an exclusive label with official tones. The Christian communities are addressed in different ways using ἐκκλησία just in First and Second Thessalonians: church of the Thessalonians (1 Th. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:1); and churches of God in Christ Jesus (2 Th. 2:14). This pattern expands greatly when First / Second Corinthians and Romans are added.

as 'flip sides of the same coin.' Out of their faith commitment comes a steadfastness to Christ even in the midst of intense hostility. The use of ὑπομονῆς here picks up the third quality mentioned in 1 Thess. 1:3, τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἔλπιδος, endurance from hope.

The atmosphere of continuing hostility to the Christian community is underscored here with ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν καὶ ταῖς θλίψεσιν αἵς ἀνέχεσθε, among all your persecutions and afflictions which you are enduring. In his first letter, Paul alluded to it several times: 1:6 (ἐν θλίψει πολλῇ, in much affliction); 2:14 (τὰ αὐτὰ ἐπάθετε, the same things you are suffering); 3:3-5, 7. All of this began with the founding of the church as Luke describes in Acts 17:1-9. The source of the opposition was the Jewish synagogue. But they manipulated the city officials against the Christians so that the government leaders also opposed the believers but not to the same level as did the Jewish leaders. Unlike in other places where over time the opposition lessened, here in Thessalonica it remained intense. One would presume this came from the synagogue, since the government authorities were not so involved. Although Paul mentions this here, he does not bring it back up in the letter body of Second Thessalonians, as he did in the first letter. Their being persecuted had not posed any problem in their spiritual life after having lived in it for this longer period of time.

f) ἔνδειγμα τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰς τὸ καταξιωθῆναι ὑμᾶς τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὑπὲρ ἣς καὶ πάσχετε, evidence of the righteous judgment of God in order to make you worthy of the kingdom of God in which behalf you are suffering (v. 5).

Grammar wise Paul does something here not possible to do in English grammar with proper style. The noun ἔνδειγμα, evidence, stands in apposition to the entire result infinitive phrase in v. 4. The experiencing of continued persecution by the Thessalonians becomes evidence for the righteous judgment of God. When viewed from the spiritual level, and not just the human level, their persecution is clear indication that God is using it for something far more significant than might otherwise be understood.

That is, God has correctly decided (τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ) to use their persecution as preparation for heaven. It would be wrong to read Paul as asserting that God caused their persecution from his words. He is not claiming that at all! Rather in the framework of Rom. 8:28, God sought to use this human induced suffering for something good, rather than letting it go to waste. The target in view here is the day of judgment (vv. 6-10; remember that we are still working on the single sentence in Greek of vv. 3-10).

The immediate objective for God's working

through their persecution is εἰς τὸ καταξιωθῆναι ὑμᾶς τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ, ὑπὲρ ἣς καὶ πάσχετε, *in order that you may be made worthy of the Kingdom of God in whose behalf you also are suffering*. The heart of this is the purpose infinitive εἰς τὸ καταξιωθῆναι, *in order to be made worthy*. The verb καταξιώ used here in the aorist passive infinitive is part of a group of words dealing with actions to qualify someone for something: ἄξιος, ἀνάξιος, ἀξιώ, καταξιώ. The sense here is not entering the Kingdom of God, but measuring up to the level of commitment by those already a part of the Kingdom. The emphasis in καταξιώ is particularly on this ‘measuring up’ aspect. Particularly insightful is the use of καταξιώ in Acts 5:41, Οἱ μὲν οὖν ἐπορεύοντο χαίροντες ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ συνεδρίου, ὅτι κατηξιώθησαν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὄνόματος ἀτιμασθῆναι, *As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name*. Interestingly, a key path toward accomplishing this is suffering persecution. This Paul emphasizes in the attached relative clause ὑπὲρ ἣς καὶ πάσχετε, *in whose behalf you are also suffering*. The clause is attached to βασιλείας via the feminine gender of the relative pronoun ἣς and the feminine noun βασιλείας. God would consider the Thessalonians to have measured up to the demands of the Kingdom by how they handled suffering from persecution.

g) εἴπερ δίκαιον παρὰ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι τοῖς θλίψουσιν ὑμᾶς θλῖψιν καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς θλιβομένοις ἄνεσιν μεθ' ἡμῶν, *since it just for God to repay those afflicting you with afflictions and to repay you who are being oppressed with relief together with us* (vv. 6b-7a).

Grammatically this causal prepositional phrase is attached to the appositional phrase ἔνδειγμα τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ in verse 5a. The evidence of a just judgment is now defined as just action by God in judging those doing the persecuting and giving relief to the victims. What we also have in this expansion element and with the one that follows is a clear signal of a major theme to be developed in the letter body of Second Thessalonians.

h) ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ μετ' ἀγγέλων δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ ἐν πυρὶ φλογός, διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν καὶ τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, οἵτινες δίκην τίσουσιν ὅλεθρον αἰώνιον ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τῆς ἵσχυος αὐτοῦ, *when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might* (vv. 7b-9).

The core prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, *in the revelation of the Lord Jesus*, goes

back to the infinitive ἀνταποδοῦναι, *to repay*, by setting the time of this divine action of God. The return of Christ is closely linked to divine judgment on the ungodly. Everything else cited above grows out of this prepositional phrase.

The noun ἀποκάλυψις is linked consistently through the NT uses (18x) with Jesus Christ and His return, as well as the parallel verb ἀποκαλύπτω, *to reveal* (26x), although the verb is used more broadly, especially outside of Paul’s writings. Both allude to a disclosing of Christ, coming in anticipation of the Day of Judgment. Paul had given some of the details of this in the letter body of First Thessalonians. But here he signals awareness of the need for further amplification that will come in the letter body of Second Thessalonians. With the constant hostility toward these believers in the city, one can understand clearly their anxiety about what this return of Christ would mean in giving them relief from their continual suffering.

The revelation of Christ will originate ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ, *from Heaven*. This is His present location and the disclosure will be a heavenly revelation. Also the ἀποκαλύψει of Christ will be accompanied μετ' ἀγγέλων δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, *together with His angels of power*. The phrase here is a Hebraism, i.e., a Hebrew way of saying ‘mighty angels,’ as is reflected in the LXX (102) rendering of Psalm 103:20 in the Hebrew. Paul repeats his earlier depiction in 1 Thess. 3:13 with this statement, which corresponds to Matt. 25:31 as well.

Also the manner of this disclosure is specified with ἐν πυρὶ φλογός, *with flaming fire*. Some uncertainty exists over whether this prepositional phrase is attached ἀποκαλύψει as an adjective modifier or to διδόντος, *giving*, that follows as an adverbial modifier. The Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th rev. ed.) places it with the noun ἀποκαλύψει, or perhaps back to the infinitive ἀνταποδοῦναι, *to pay back*, although the grammar evidence would favor attaching it to the participle διδόντος. The background image in Exod. 3:2 (cf. Act 7:30) of the burning bush with Moses would favor attaching it to the noun as an accompanying signal of divine action and presence.

What will be given out at the ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ is now specified (v. 8) as διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν καὶ τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, *giving vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus*. God will take vengeance upon the persecutors of His people. These are defined in two ways, since most of them were Jewish. First, they τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν, *do not know God*, in spite of their claims to being God’s covenant people Israel. Second, which grows out of the first, they μὴ ὑπακούουσιν

τῶ εὐαγγελίω τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, are not obeying the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. Their ignorance of God is due to their rejection of the Gospel and is what has led to their persecution of the believers in Thessalonica. To be clear, some Jews in the synagogues there did accept Christ and became a part of the Christian community during the initial preaching of the Gospel by Paul, and his associates. But the leadership and a majority of the members of the synagogue rejected this preaching and turned very hostile toward it. But at the revelation of Christ these will recognize their fatal mistake when God's ἔκδίκησιν¹⁰⁶ is poured out on them.

What does this διδόντος ἔκδίκησιν imply to these wrongdoers? The qualitative relative pronoun clause spells out some details: οἵτινες δίκην τίσουσιν ὅλεθρον αἰώνιον ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τῆς ισχύος αὐτοῦ, who are such who will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction separated from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His strength (v. 9). This clause specifies that God's ἔκδίκησιν is eternal separation in damnation from Him. The heart of this punishment (δίκην τίσουσιν) is ὅλεθρον αἰώνιον, eternal destruction. Central to this destruction is separation from the presence of God: ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης τῆς ισχύος αὐτοῦ. They are left completely cut off from God's protection and resources available to them, even in their evil life, through God as Creator and Sustainer of their life (cf. Mt. 25:41, 46; Lk. 13:27). They now belong totally to Satan for him to torment and abuse them at will for all eternity. Now that he has them totally in his grip, there's no deals cut for relief, no negotiating for lesser punishment etc. The miseries of eternal Hell are their fate without any relief ever. This is a fate totally unexpected by the synagogue leaders who persecuted the believers in the city.

i) ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐνδοξασθῆναι ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις αὐτοῦ καὶ θαυμασθῆναι ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύσασιν, ὅτι ἐπιστεύθη τὸ μαρτύριον ἡμῶν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς, ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, whenever He may come to be glorified by His saints and to be marveled at among all those who have put their faith in Him, because our witness was believed by you, on that day (v. 10).

What does this τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ mean for the believers at Thessalonica? It is laid out in the temporal clause. The τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ (v. 7b) now is defined in two ways. It is a coming of Christ ἐνδοξασθῆναι ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις αὐτοῦ, to be glorified by His saints. The use of ἐνδοξάζομαι only here and in v. 12 underscore the sharing of the Divine presence with

¹⁰⁶For the word group see ἔκδικένω, ἔκδικος, ἔκδίκησις. This verb, adjective, noun set underscores God setting the record of justice completely straight in inflicting punishment on wrongdoers according to His standards of justice. The LXX background, especially of the noun ἔκδίκησις, defines its meaning for NT writers out of OT standards, rather than Greek or Roman standards of justice.

all its blessings in contrast to the total loss of this by the evil doers (v. 9). Second, his coming is θαυμασθῆναι ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύσασιν, to be marveled at among all those who put their faith in Him. The aorist participle πιστεύσασιν stresses conversion faith commitment that was then lived out in obedience. His coming will be overwhelming (θαυμάζω¹⁰⁷) to believers because of its staggering greatness and awesomeness. The idea of vision and contemplation of what is seen stands central to this idea.¹⁰⁸ The theophanies of the OT stand in the background here with the overpowering presence of God made manifest in some way or another to the witness. The difference is that this manifestation of the presence of Christ will be the most overpowering experience ever for believers. Thus the believers at Thessalonica will move from τοῖς διωγμοῖς ὑμῶν καὶ ταῖς θλίψεσιν (persecutions and afflictions; v. 4b) to ἄνεσιν, relief (v. 7a), and this is what that will be, a sharing in His glorious presence in complete amazement (v. 10).

And all of it is connected to ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, on that Day (v. 10), which goes back to ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus (v. 7b). By these two parallel phrases Paul ties the material between them together around the coming of Christ as Judgment Day.

Although all of these many expansion elements build off of Paul's thankfulness to God for the Thessalonians, they additionally send signals of the details yet to come in the letter body. Thus they are but 'appetizers' of the main course yet to come!

In vv. 11-12, Paul shifts into a typical *Prayer of Intercession* for the Thessalonians. In four of Paul's letters, he begins with his standard *Prayer of Thanksgiving* but before ending the *Proem* he will shift into a *Prayer of Intercession* for his targeted readers. Second Thessalonians is the first letter to contain this pattern. Note also Col. 1:9-23; Eph. 1:15-23; Phil. 1:7-11. Specific concerns for spiritual growth normally top the list in his prayer expressions in this prayer.

In 1:11-12, by the use of very different and creative grammar, Paul sets up a twofold prayer concern for the Thessalonians. The purpose prepositional phrase using a relative pronoun, Εἰς ὃ, To this end, comes at

¹⁰⁷See the word group † θαῦμα, † θαυμάζω, † θαυμάσιος, † θαυμαστός for more details. [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 3:27.]

¹⁰⁸"θαυμάζειν and the underlying θαῦμα, whose root is linked with θέα, 'vision,' and θεάομαι, 'contemplate,' are common from the time of Homer and Hesiod. The adj. θαυμάσιος, attested from the time of Hesiod, is preferred by Atticists to the verbal adj. θαυμαστός, which is found from the time of the Homeric hymns." [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 3:27.]

the beginning of the single sentence in vv. 11-12 and anticipates the purpose ἵνα dependent clause with its expansions in vv. 11c-12 after the main clause verb προσευχόμεθα. This purpose clause contains two verbs, ἀξιώσῃ and πληρώσῃ, stating the two objectives of Paul's intercession to God for the Thessalonians.

Thus Paul prays regarding these believers that ὑμᾶς ἀξιώσῃ τῆς κλήσεως ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν καὶ πληρώσῃ πᾶσαν εύδοκίαν ἀγαθωσύνης καὶ ἔργον πίστεως ἐν δυνάμει, [our God will make you worthy of His calling and bring to fullness every desire for goodness and deed of faith in His power](#). That is, Paul's prayer is for God to bless every expression of their deep faith commitment to Him.

These two verbal expressions of prayer objective extend first of all ὑπεραυξάνει ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν καὶ πλεονάζει ἡ ἀγάπη, [is flourishing your faith and is becoming abundant your love](#) (v. 3), which were the basis of his thanksgiving in v. 3. Also they amplify the purpose expression εἰς τὸ καταξιωθῆναι, [in order to be made worthy](#), in v. 5. Additionally, ἐνδοξασθῆ, in the adverbial result clause introduced by ὅπως, repeats the purpose infinitive ἐνδοξασθῆναι in v. 10. Thus a strong link between thanksgiving and intercession is set up here by Paul in regard to the Thessalonians. Paul's intercession for the Thessalonians is that God will prepare them well for the coming of Christ and the Day of Judgment.

His core expression, καὶ προσευχόμεθα πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, [also we are always praying for you](#), signals the shift from thanksgiving, Εὐχαριστεῖν ὄφειλομεν τῷ Θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, [we ought always give thanks to God for you](#) (v. 3), to intercession to God in behalf of his readers. The present tense verb combined with the temporal adverb πάντοτε present this prayer activity by Paul and his associates as an ongoing responsibility.

Praying for others, rather than just for ourselves, is a central emphasis on [prayer](#) inside the NT.¹⁰⁹ The goal of such praying is for the complete welfare of others, especially of fellow believers. Although praying for the sick is included in a few isolated instances in intercessory praying in the NT, the dominate emphasis found inside the NT in the teaching by Jesus and the apostles is praying for others to be guided by God in their living so that a life of unconditional obedience to Him emerges. That is, their spiritual welfare takes precedent over their physical welfare. The intercessory prayer here in 1:11-12 follows the basic pattern of

¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, the topic of intercessory prayer typically in internet based articles focuses on praying for the physical healing of other people, usually by a religious authority figure. Many of the articles center on the physical and psychological benefits of such both for the sick and to the person doing the praying, e.g., “Efficacy of prayer,” [wikipedia.org](#). Of course, this emphasis misses the point of Jesus and the apostles regarding the role of prayer completely. Such an approach fosters an ego centric use of prayer and treats God as though He is obligated to do what we want Him to do..

Paul's teaching about [intercession](#) throughout his letters in almost 30 places. The most detailed presentation of his thinking on this point can be discovered in the five intercessory prayers of Paul in the *Proema* of his letters: 1 Thess. 1:11-12; Col. 1:9-23; Eph. 1:15-23; Phil. 1:7-11. The specific content of the intercession is customized to specific needs in each of the five churches. No ‘set pattern’ emerges from these.

What emerges from the Proem therefore is a strong emphasis upon prayer. This ‘opening’ prayer of the letter imitates the opening prayer of the gathered congregations at Thessalonica in the various house church groups. It underscores Paul's very positive feeling toward the Christian community in the city. The intercessory prayer stresses his pastoral concern for the group.

In the writing out of these two prayers, the apostle has also signaled significant themes that he intends to address in the body of the letter. Consequently the listeners in the gathered assemblies had some forewarning about the contents and themes of the letter before the main body of it was read to them.

9.3.3 Letter Body

In the letter body of 2:1 - 3:15, the apostle follows through on his signals in the Proem of discussing the coming of the Lord as the main topic.

He sets up the discussion in 2:1-2 that will be foundational to everything else in the letter body:¹¹⁰

Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ὑπὲρ τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῆς ἐπ' αὐτὸν 2 εἰς τὸ μὴ ταχέως σαλευθῆναι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ νοὸς μηδὲ θροεῖσθαι, μήτε διὰ πνεύματος μήτε διὰ λόγου μήτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι' ἡμῶν, ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου.

1 As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here.

The topic is identified in τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῆς ἐπ' αὐτὸν, [the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together with Him](#). This links up to what Paul had written to them earlier in 1 Thess. 3:13-18.¹¹¹ Although this earlier ex-

¹¹⁰ Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, “we beg you, brothers” as in 1 Thess 5:12, is a variant form of the παρακαλοῦμεν construction (see 1 Thess 4:1 with comment), followed not only by the vocative ἀδελφοί but also by a prepositional phrase (ὑπὲρ τῆς παρουσίας κτλ) and a request expressed by εἰς τὸ with the infinitive (v 2). [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 163.]

¹¹¹ First Thess. 3:13-18. 13 Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων, ἵνα μὴ λυπῆσθε καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ

pression seems simple enough, some kind of misunderstanding over it had emerged between the writing of the two letters. The specific nature of that misunderstanding is expressed by Paul in 2:2, εἰς τὸ μὴ ταχέως σαλευθῆναι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ νοὸς μηδὲ θροεῖσθαι, μήτε διὰ πνεύματος μήτε διὰ λόγου μήτε δί’ ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δί’ ἡμῶν, ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου· *not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here.* Somehow at least some of the Christians at Thessalonica had come to think that the second coming of Christ had already happened, or else that the beginning of the end was already taking place.

In order to understand clearly what Paul alludes to, we need to be reminded of the sets of terms used for the coming of Christ.

Here he speaks of it as ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου, *is present the Day of the Lord* (v. 2).¹¹² The verb

οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἀπίδα. 14 εἰ γάρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη, οὕτως καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ. 15 Τοῦτο γάρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας· 16 ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγgi θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον, 17 ἐπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἄμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα. 18 Ὡστε παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις.

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. 15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

¹¹²“It cannot be seriously disputed that “is present” is the natural sense of ἐνέστηκεν. This is the regular force of the perfect tense of ἐνιστάναι in NT usage. Twice Paul distinguishes ἐνεστῶτα from μέλλοντα as ‘things present’ from ‘things to come’ (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 3:22). The ἐνεστῶσα ἀνάγκη of 1 Cor 7:26 is the ‘present distress’; the αἰών ἐνεστῶς πονηρός of Gal 1:4 is the ‘present evil age’; the καιρὸς ἐνεστηκός of Heb 9:9 is the ‘present time’ (whether the ‘time now present’ or ‘time then present’ is to be decided by exegesis). cf. RV ‘the day of the Lord is now present’; RSV ‘... has come’; NEB ‘... is already here.’ But there remains considerable support for the sense of imminence (which ἐνέστηκεν does not bear) rather than actual presence; cf. AV ‘the day of Christ is at hand’; ASV ‘the day of the Lord is just at hand.’ Lightfoot translates ἐνέστηκεν as ‘is imminent’ (‘The Apostle then does not deny that the day of the Lord may be near. He asserts that it is not imminent’); cf. Stephenson (‘On the Meaning ...’) for the argument that the rendering ‘is present’ or ‘has come’ is ‘logically impossible’: it cannot be supposed that ‘the Thessalonians could

ἐνέστηκεν comes from ἐνίστημι with the core idea of *to put something in place or into effect*. Inside the Thessalonian church were those who thought that this day of the Lord had already been instituted in terms of the final events of the end.

In verse three, Paul indicates the necessity of some other things happening first. Importantly for our concern is that this ‘already instituted day of the Lord’ thinking was coming from either a teacher or teachers: Μή τις ὑμᾶς ἔξαπατήσῃ κατὰ μηδένα τρόπον, *Let no one deceive you in any way.* The specific identity of these individuals is not given, because it’s not important. What was being taught is the important aspect because of the damage it was doing among the congregations.

Paul had signaled this time in the Proem statement in 1:7, ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ μετ’ ἀγγέλων δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, *at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from Heaven with His mighty angels.* A major objective is this disclosure is then in v. 8 stated as ἐν πυρὶ φλογός, διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν καὶ τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ, *in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus.* Another objective for this disclosure is also affirmed in v. 10: ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐνδοξασθῆναι ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις αὐτοῦ καὶ θαυμασθῆναι ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύσασιν, ὅτι ἐπιστεύθη τὸ μαρτύριον ἡμῶν ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς, ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ, *when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.* This praising of Christ by His saints comes at the same time as the destruction of the wicked according to v. 9.

Trying to identify the specific content of this false teaching is very difficult, given the very limited amount of data that Paul provides in the letter. His initial readers already knew its content well, and thus he feels no need to spell out its details to them in this letter. The meager information provided in Second Thessalonians suggests that it moved along a sense of the hardships upon Christians at the very end of time were already happening, given the persecution being suffered by believers at Thessalonica. Or, possibly it represents some primitive form of a ‘realized eschatology’ teaching that the end is imminent and the church is already reigning victoriously by resisting both persecution and temptation coming from the world around them.¹¹³ Whatever

have been misled by false letters saying that the events which Paul has described in I Thessalonians had taken place.” [F. F. Bruce, *I and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 165.]

¹¹³“Aus (“Relevance,” 263, 264) suggests that the severity of the Thessalonians’ persecution made them think that the eschatological birth pangs had begun (cf. Isa 66:7) and that the Day of the Lord had arrived — much as, at a later date, the severity of the

its contours, Paul adamantly denies any connection to it completely: ἀπὸ τοῦ νοός μηδὲ θροεῖσθαι, μήτε διὰ πνεύματος μήτε διὰ λόγου μήτε δ' ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι' ἡμῶν, neither through a spirit nor through a word nor through a letter as though from us (v. 2b).

Beginning in v. 3, he corrects the mistaken understanding about that moment in time when Jesus returns and sets in motion the eternal order. The ‘correction’ covers vv. 3-12. Then the apostle deals with implications of the coming day of the Lord in 2:13-3:15.

What is his ‘correction’ in vv. 3-12? Essentially there must first rise up a ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, a man of lawlessness, also known as ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας, the son for destruction (v. 3). His actions, character, and influence are then described. Currently he is being restrained τὸ κατέχον (vv. 6-7).¹¹⁴ This doesn’t mean that evil is not presently at work in the world, but instead that at the very end evil will become dramatically worse than at present because the restrainer (ὁ κατέχων, v. 7) will be removed (ἐκ μέσου γένηται, v. 7) at the very end. This will open a floodgate of evil upon the world just before Christ in His coming destroys evil by the breath of His mouth (τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, v. 8).¹¹⁵ Paul never identifies either ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, the man of lawlessness (v. 3) or the restrainer (ὁ κατέχων, v. 7).¹¹⁶

persecution of Christians under Septimius Severus ‘disturbed the minds of the many’ and encouraged the opinion that the Parousia of Antichrist was then ‘already approaching’ (Euseb. Hist. Eccl. 6.7). But in the list of factors which might possibly have led the Thessalonians to their conclusion about the Day of the Lord no mention is made of the force of circumstances or the severity of persecution.

“Another possibility is that the Thessalonians had recently been exposed to teaching which moved some of them to accept a realized, or even overrealized, eschatology, not unlike that with which Paul later takes issue in 1 Cor 4:8, when certain members of the Corinthian church appear to have embraced the idea that the kingdom of Christ had already been consummated and that they themselves were reigning with him. If so, the new teaching was less developed than it was to become in Corinth; the arguments used to counter it at Thessalonica are not those which Paul used in his Corinthian correspondence.”

[F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 165.]

¹¹⁴This correlates with John’s ‘thousand year’ restraint of the devil in Rev. 20:1-3. Paul indicates a generally common perspective to that found in Revelation, even though he and John have dramatically different ways of describing the very end of human history.

¹¹⁵Compare to Rev. 19:15a, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἔκπορεύεται ρόμφαιά ὥξεῖα, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ πατάξῃ τὰ ἔθνη, From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations,

¹¹⁶Evidently the apostle felt no need to rehearse all the details since this had been provided earlier when he was present at Thessalonica (vv. 5-6): 5 Οὐ μνημονεύετε ὅτι ἔτι ὕν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ταῦτα ἔλεγον ὑμῖν; 6 καὶ νῦν τὸ κατέχον οἴδατε εἰς τὸ ἀποκαλυφθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ ἔαυτοῦ καιρῷ. 5 Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? 6 And you know what

But the context makes it clear that both these individuals represent forces in opposition to God and Christ. Whether they are human or supernatural is not spelled out. But what is asserted by Paul is their close connection to Satan (vv. 9-10). The impact of this activity is massive upon humanity in turning it against God. But in rejecting God, humanity ends up in deeper delusion and deception that will doom it to destruction (vv. 11-12).¹¹⁷

What does emerge from this is that the false view (v. 3) also centered on a futuristic eschatology just as does Paul’s view. The false teachers either had their ‘facts’ wrong, in that Paul’s denial of connection to this in v. 2 suggests their teaching was claimed to have originated from him in connection to 1 Thess. 3:13-18. Or, else they made a false application of Paul’s teaching to contend that this very end had begun in their day. This latter understanding would help account for the group that had withdrawn from society to ‘wait for the Lord’ as described in 3:6-13. But interpretive uncertainty remains over many of the details of Paul’s correction in vv. 3-12. And this urges caution about drawing too many conclusions. The essence of Paul’s correction, however, is clear. The day of the Lord has not yet been set in motion because the outburst of evil has not yet taken place like it will at the very end.

What should Christians do as they anticipate the very end of time? Paul supplies some answers in 2:13 - 3:15. A quite overview of these will be helpful.

First, in 2:13-14 Paul frames an affirmation of the salvation in v. 13a of the Thessalonian believers in the repeated pattern of the *Proem Prayer of Thanksgiving*: Ἡμεῖς δὲ ὀφείλομεν εὐχαριστεῖν τῷ Θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοὶ ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ κυρίου, But we must always is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes.

¹¹⁷In fact, all that we can learn about the sense in which they thought the Day of the Lord to have come must be inferred from the counterargument of vv 3-8, and the interpretation of the counterargument is so uncertain that the wise interpreter will recognize the limits placed here on his knowledge. Probably there was no question of the Thessalonians’ replacing the teaching they had already received with a completely new system. But if some of them had drawn unwarranted inferences from the statement in 1 Thess 5:5 that they were all ‘sons of the day’ (so von Dobschütz ad loc.), or if a prophet had announced in the church that the Day of the Lord was now present, they might well have been bewildered; what had happened to the Resurrection and translation into the Lord’s presence which they had been taught to expect at the Parousia? Paul and his colleagues, who knew more about their converts’ problem than the exegete of today can know, judged that it would help them to be told something about the sequence of events leading up to the Day of the Lord. They had been taught about the actual events, but they needed to have them set in their chronological relationship.” [F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 166.]

give thank to God for you brothers beloved by the Lord... (v. 1:3). By this, Paul's affirmation is set in the strongest possible affirmation of the Thessalonians themselves. Two points are asserted about them. First, εὐλατο ὑμᾶς ὁ Θεός ἀπαρχήν εἰς σωτηρίαν ἐν ἀγιασμῷ πνεύματος καὶ πίστει ἀληθείας, **God chose you** [the Thessalonians] as a first fruit of salvation by setting them apart by the Spirit and by their faith coming out of Truth. Second, this marvelous salvation has a purpose: εἰς ὃ [καὶ] ἐκάλεσεν ὑμᾶς διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἡμῶν εἰς περιποίησιν δόξης τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. **Unto which He also called you through our Gospel for acquiring the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Thus the first implication of correct understanding of τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡμῶν ἐπισυναγωγῆς ἐπ' αὐτὸν **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together with Him** (2:1) is to realize what that means for eternity for believers. Salvation and calling fundamentally mean being with Jesus in eternity who is the very Presence (δόξης) of Almighty God. As long as we are still in this body on earth, that salvation goal has not yet been reached, contrary to what the false teachers were possibly advocating.

Second, in 2:15-17, Paul draws the conclusion that believers need to stand firm in the apostolic teaching rather than being deceived by false teaching: "Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δ' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν, **So then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions which you were taught either by our word or by our letter.** Then in vv. 16-17 he repeats the tone of the Prayer of Intercession in the Proem (cf. 1:11-12) with a prayer wish for God παρακαλέσαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας καὶ στηρίξαι ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ ἀγαθῷ, **to encourage your hearts and to establish them in every good work and deed.**

Third, the apostle appeals to the Thessalonians for their prayers for him in 3:1-5. Paul's request is twofold. First, ἵνα ὁ λόγος τοῦ κυρίου τρέχῃ καὶ δοξάζηται καθὼς καὶ πρὸς ὑμᾶς, **that the Word of the Lord may run and be honored just as also with you.** Then second that καὶ ἵνα ῥυσθῶμεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀτόπων καὶ πονηρῶν ἀνθρώπων· οὐ γὰρ πάντων ἡ πίστις, **and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil men for not all have faith.** The basis for these requests is seen in vv. 3-5 where Paul expresses his confidence in the steadfastness of the Thessalonians to remain true to the Gospel and thus stand under the blessing of God. He concludes this will a prayer (v. 5): 'Ο δὲ κύριος κατευθύναι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας εἰς τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ εἰς τὴν ὑπομονὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ. **May the Lord direct your hearts into love for God and into steadfastness to Christ.** Thus prayer for one another should play an important role as believers await the coming of the Lord.

Fourth, Paul cautions the Thessalonians about idleness in 3:6-15. The core admonition comes in v. 6

as a solemn warning: Παραγγέλλομεν δὲ ὑμῖν, ἀδελφοί, ἐν ὄνόματι τοῦ κυρίου [ἡμῶν] Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ στέλλεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ παντὸς ἀδελφοῦ ἀτάκτως περιπατοῦντος καὶ μὴ κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ἦν παρελάβοσαν παρ' ἡμῶν. **Now we admonish you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ for you to stand apart from every brother living in idleness and not according to the teaching which they received from us.** Critical to this warning is the idea in the adverb of ἀτάκτως, translated as **idleness**. Only used here in vv. 6 and 11 in the entire NT, the second use provides some depiction of what Paul meant. τινας περιπατοῦντας ἐν ὑμῖν ἀτάκτως μηδὲν ἐργαζομένους ἀλλὰ περιεργαζομένους, **some are walking among you in idleness, that is, doing nothing but being busybodies.** Paul's specific admonition to them in v. 12 provides additional clues about their idleness: τοῖς δὲ τοιούτοις παραγγέλλομεν καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, ἵνα μετὰ ἡσυχίας ἐργαζόμενοι τὸν ἔαυτῶν ἄρτον ἔσθιωσιν, **Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.** These idlers were 'waiting for the Lord' to come by quitting their jobs and sponging off the others in the larger community of believers. Such action is clearly wrong as Paul reminds them (v. 10) that he had told them this when he was with them earlier. Additionally, he had set the right example before them by earning his own way while with them (vv. 7-9).

He does end this with an admonition for the Thessalonians reading this letter to not deal harshly with these wayward brothers but still to deal firmly with their idleness (vv. 14-15). The punishment was to center disciplinary expulsion from participation in the life of the church into order to shock them into realizing and acknowledging their wrong actions.

From Paul's advice to the Thessalonians, what should believers be doing to get ready for the Lord's return? Several helpful guidelines emerge here. Don't get led astray by false teaching about that return. Engage in prayer for one another. Stay deeply rooted in the principle of scripture about that return. Conduct your lives normally in the context of faithfulness to Christ so that no 'loose ends' will be present when that day arrives. In other words, **Ὑμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, μὴ ἐγκακήσητε καλοποιοῦντες, but you, brothers, do not grow weary while doing good things** (v. 13).

9.3.4 Conclusio

3.16 Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ κύριος τῆς εἰρήνης δώῃ ὑμῖν τὴν εἰρήνην διὰ παντὸς ἐν παντὶ τρόπῳ. ὁ κύριος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν. 17 Ο ἀσπασμὸς τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ Παύλου, ὅ ἐστιν σημεῖον ἐν πάσῃ ἐπιστολῇ· οὕτως γράφω. 18 Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ὑμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν.

3.16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you. 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. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

The *Conclusio* given in vv. 16-18 is rather standard for *Conclusia* in the letters of Paul, although it is one of the shorter ones to the churches along with Second Corinthians. This one in Second Thessalonians contains a prayer of blessing (v. 16), a sender verification (v. 17), and a benedictio (v. 18).

Prayer of blessing, v. 16. Αύτὸς δὲ ὁ κύριος τῆς εἰρήνης δώῃ ὑμῖν τὴν εἰρήνην διὰ παντὸς ἐν παντὶ τρόπῳ ὁ κύριος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν. Now *may the Lord of peace himself* give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you.

This prayer has echoes of the one at the end of First Thessalonians (5:23), Αύτὸς δὲ ὁ θεός τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὀλοτελεῖς, καὶ ὀλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ὑμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ τηρηθείη, *May the God of peace himself* sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept soundf and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The thrust of the two prayers are different but Paul closes both letters with this similar prayer expression. Additionally, a shorter but similar prayer comes in Rom. 15:33, Ο δὲ θεός τῆς εἰρήνης μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν, ἀμήν. *The God of peace be with all of you. Amen*

If you noticed as we surveyed the letter, the role of prayer in Second Thessalonians is significant with several prayer expressions being included in the letter. Paul's prayer concern for the believers at Thessalonica is significant, and he solicits their prayers for him in the confidence that these believers engage in prayer as a vital part of their Christian life.

The phrase ὁ θεός τῆς εἰρήνης, *the God of peace*, is found also in Rom. 15:23; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20. The sense of the genitive case construction is the God who supplies peace. One should remember from the Salutatio discussions that εἰρήνη is a positive dynamic rather than just the absence of conflict as is the case with the English word peace.

The use of the optative mood form of the verb δῷν ὑμῖν τὴν εἰρήνην generates the sense of '*May He give you peace*' that is clearly in the form of a prayer. The scope of this prayer request is inclusive: διὰ παντὸς ἐν παντὶ τρόπῳ, *through all things in all ways*. What God can give to believers has no bounds or limits in filling their lives with His presence and blessing.

The second prayer petition follows and is closely linked to the first: ὁ κύριος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν, *The Lord be with all of you*. Such short prayers are often without the core verb, as is the case here, because it was well understood that the optative form εἴη would be under-

stood by the readers. The peace of God is linked inseparably to the presence of Christ. It is His presence that is the source of our peace with God. This connection is reflected in the Salutatio at the beginning of the letter: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς [ἡμῶν] καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (1:2).

Sender verification, v. 17. Ο ἀσπασμὸς τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ Παύλου, ὃ ἔστι σημεῖον ἐν πάσῃ ἐπιστολῇ οὕτως γράφω, *This greeting with my own hand Paul, which is the indication in every letter; thus I write*. This somewhat awkward expression is more formulaic in nature than being intended as a regular sentence statement.¹¹⁸ What Paul intends here is to validate the contents to the readers in Thessalonica who would be somewhat familiar with his own hand writing, more so than with that of the letter writer, either Timothy or Silas, or both. Additionally it added a person touch to the letter written by someone else. The singular phrase ἐν πάσῃ ἐπιστολῇ, *in every letter*, poses no problem even though this is just the third letter of the thirteen in Paul's collection. It's point is to indicate that using a writing secretary will be the pattern the apostle will follow in every letter that he will write over the years of ministry. Such a practice was entirely standard in the culture, especially for more formal letters.

Benedictio, v. 18. Η χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ὑμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you*. This final benedictory prayer exactly matches that in First Thessalonians (5:28), except for the addition of πάντων, *all of*. This is slightly more emphatic than Η χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ὑμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν in 1 Thess. 5:28. It matches exactly Rom. 16:20b, Η χάρις τοῦ κυρίου ὑμῶν Ἰησοῦ μεθ' ὑμῶν.

The double expression of final prayers is not that

¹¹⁸"3:17. Ο ἀσπασμὸς τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ Παύλου, 'The greeting in my own hands—Paul's.' The same formula is used in 1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18; cf. also Gal 6:11, 'see in what large letters I am writing with my own hand (τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ)', and Philem 19a, where Paul signs his IOU (ἐγὼ Παῦλος ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ).

"It was no uncommon thing in ancient letter-writing for the sender, having dictated the bulk of the letter, to write the last sentence or two in his own hand. This is the best explanation of the change of script at the end of several papyrus letters which have been preserved. This practice would help to authenticate the letter (for readers who recognized the sender's writing); a more general purpose would be to make the letter look more personal than one written entirely by an amanuensis. Cicero seems commonly to have written his letters himself, but where he uses an amanuensis, he indicates that the letter-closing is in his own hand (cf. Ad. Att. 13.28: *hoc manu mea*, 'this in my own hand'). In another letter he quotes a sentence from one which he himself had received from Pompey and says that it came in *extremo, ipsius manu*, 'at the end, in his own hand' (Ad. Att. 8.1)."

[F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 215–216.]

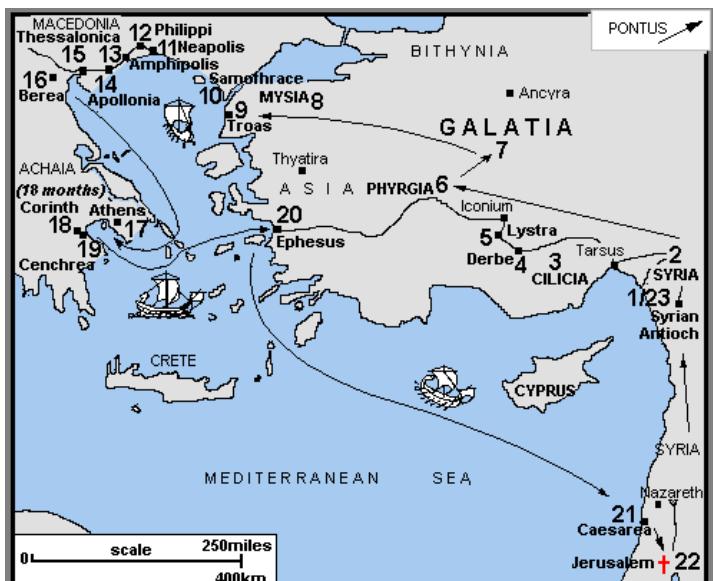
unusual for Paul as 1 Cor. 16:23-24 and 2 Cor. 13:11, 13 illustrate, comparable here to vv. 16, 18. But the more formal Benedictio at the very end echoes the synagogue pattern of closing their Friday evening gathering with a formal benediction. As the leader of the gathering orally pronounced this benediction, the blessing of God was invoked upon those who had assembled and were now committed to applying what had been studied from the Torah that evening. This was something the early church picked up and used in their meetings as well. But the Christian perspective focused on the powerful dynamic of divine grace to guide the believers to obedience rather than the powerless Torah commands.

CONCLUSION

What can we conclude from these first three letters of Paul that were linked to his second missionary journey in the early 50s? Several things emerge that are worth examining as background.

1) The second missionary journey of the apostle Paul (Acts 15:40 - 18:22) brought him and his associates first into the familiar territory of his home in Tarsus and then among the Galatian churches established on the first missionary journey. At Lystra in Galatia, Paul and Silas added Timothy to the group, and upon landing in Macedonia Luke was added. Ephesus was the intention after Galatia but it was not in God's plans at this point. Instead, after moving across to Macedonia from Troas, time was spent primarily in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Timothy and Silas remained behind while Paul traveled into the province of Achaia stopping first at Athens, and then spending a lot of time at Corinth. This marked the terminus point of the journey, and from Corinth Paul and his group made their way back to Antioch by way of Ephesus and Jerusalem. This trip along with the first trip, limited to southern Galatia on the mainland, were the 'evangelizing' trips where numerous new congregations were planted.

Taking place in the late 40s and early 50s, it signaled the beginning of Paul's writing ministry that would gradually produce the thirteen letters contained in the canonical New Testament. The three letters coming out of this second missionary journey were Galatians, along with First and Second Thessalonians. Galatians comes either from Troas or soon after entering Macedonia, and it was addressed to the collection of churches established on the first missionary journey in the southern part of the province of Galatia. It is the only letter of Paul addressed to multiple congregations. First and Second Thessalonians were written while Paul was in Achaia -- first from Athens and second from Corinth -- to the Macedonian community located in the city of Thessalonica. The letter to the Galatians focuses



almost totally on problems that had arisen in the church even after Paul's re-visiting of them at the beginning of the second missionary journey (Acts 16:1). The tone of the letter is sharp and blunt. But when First and Second Thessalonians were written several months later, they focus on a congregation with spiritual vitality and one trying to correctly understand Paul's teachings, especially in regard to the return of Christ at the end of time. Both letters are divided between devoted affirmation of the believers and attempts to correct their misunderstanding of Paul's teachings.

2) In order to understand the contents of Paul's letters, one must understand the circumstances in the churches to whom the letters are written. All of his letters are 'circumstantial,' in that particular circumstances in the life of the house church groups in a location are what prompt the writing of the letter. Paul attempts to help each group find solutions to their problems.

Very importantly one must never treat any of Paul's letters as a theological treatise presenting the apostle's belief system in some kind of abstract manner, such as would be found in a modern systematic theology book. For the apostle, belief was centered in the Gospel that he preached and taught. But it was never detached from the functional day to day issues of Christian living. Thus his letters only treat the part of his Gospel understanding that he deems applicable to the specific issues present in the life of the church / churches being addressed by each letter. And Paul will express the same relevant aspect of his Gospel in different ways to different churches.

One of the greatest errors made by Christians over the past several hundred years is the false assumption that the apostle developed a detailed complex system of belief from which he chose relevant bits and pieces to apply in each of his letters. This reflects a way of thinking utterly irrelevant to the way religious

understanding existed both in the background Jewish mind-set and certainly not in any of the early Christians apostles.¹¹⁹ Consequently no supposed ‘key’ to Pauline theology exists outside of the minds of modern misguided theologians. The pursuit of such is an exercise in utter futility! As is witnessed by the complexity and contradictory nature of such modern efforts.

Also critical to remember is that Paul’s understanding of the Gospel was a growing, evolving experience for him. By the time Second Timothy is written in the mid 60s, he understands far more about the Gospel than he did with the writing of Galatians in the beginning 50s. Central to this developing understanding is the simple reality that each new set of issues arising in the churches demanded seeking God’s mind on how the Gospel should apply to the solving of the issues.¹²⁰ Thus Paul’s early statement ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί, **to reveal His Son in me**, in Gal. 1:16 refers back to Paul’s experience on the Damascus road, as described in Acts 9:3-19a, as a ‘get acquainted with Christ’ disclosure that provided the apostle to be with salvation and a basic understanding of what that meant. From this foundation, he would develop his understanding of the nature of that relationship with Christ and how it should impact life. He would learn more through continued revelation and also from others as is illustrated by Ananias in Acts 9, and affirmed later by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:3a, παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις, ὡς καὶ παρέλαβον, **for I passed on to you from the first what also I had received.** Paul’s ‘theology’ is a functional understanding of the Gospel, rather than a theoretical perception. But modern systematic theology seeks to turn it into abstract theory, and thus always fails in such an objective.

¹¹⁹Careful analysis of the so-called ‘classical’ philosophers such as Plato will reveal that their mind never worked in any kind of systematic manner comparable to modern thinking either.

¹²⁰My doctoral dissertation completed in 1975 on the Pauline concept of the intermediate state as reflected in 2 Cor. 5:1-10 exposed me dramatically to the developing and sometimes changing viewpoints of Paul on particular topics. Very few modern ‘theologians’ give adequate attention to this aspect of Paul’s thinking about the Gospel which he preached and taught.

The reason for this is simple. Producing some kind of theology of Paul predicated on the growing understanding of Paul, rather than on a falsely assumed flat, one dimensional perspective, makes such a modern product enormously more complex and difficult, if not impossible.

More helpful from the modern perspective is the work in biblical theology perspectives that treat the themes of each of Paul’s letters separately. Yet even here, many writers find it impossible to resist the tendency to see key themes in the individual letters and then develop their understanding of Paul around these in some kind of ‘systematic’ development. How many times have you heard even preachers claim that Romans is Paul’s systematic theology? This is pure garbage! The modern western mind-set is very uncomfortable with the presentation of ideas that do not conform to its ways of ‘logical’ reasoning. Somehow if Paul doesn’t ‘out think’ some modern brilliant mind, he cannot be a heroic figure to them. .

Paul’s religious thinking is geared for parish ministry, not for the academic classroom.

3) Additionally the contents of Paul’s letters are intended to communicate his ideas to the typical believer in the various churches, not the educated elite among the early church. For a modern layperson reading Paul’s letters, this may seem impossible. And when understanding of the style of Greek writing is present, that Paul was communicating to ordinal folks may seem questionable. But several things signal his intention to speak to the regular folks. First, at Corinth in 1 Cor. 6:9-11, the composition of the church membership clearly came from regular people in the city, not from the elite. One would assume that the composition of the church at Corinth was not too different than in the other churches. Second, the problems treated by Paul in his letters are not socially high status based problems that only wealthy, highly educated members would be having.

Third, Paul’s style of writing Greek is labeled correctly as periodic Greek which reflects oral dictation kind of thinking. He does not reflect highly eloquent neoclassical patterns of writing Greek as is found in Hebrews and James, for example. His letters do not even match Luke - Acts in reflecting training in classical Greek. Unquestionably, his style is far better than the almost illiterate style of Greek in Second Peter. What we do encounter in Paul’s letters are patterns of style reflecting mid level competency in writing and thinking in Greek. What cannot be determined precisely is how much of this is due to Paul and how much comes out of the skills of the various writing secretaries whom he used.

Peter’s comment in 2 Pet. 3:15-16 needs to be properly understood in this connection:

15 καὶ τὴν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν μακροθυμίαν σωτηρίαν ἡγεῖσθε, καθὼς καὶ ὁ ἀγαπητὸς ἡμῶν ἀδελφὸς Παῦλος κατὰ τὴν δοθεῖσαν αὐτῷ σοφίαν ἔγραψεν ὑμῖν, 16 ὡς καὶ ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐπιστολαῖς λαλῶν ἐν αὐταῖς περὶ τούτων, **ἐν αἷς ἔστιν δυσνόητά τινα,** ἃ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς καὶ ἀστήρικτοι στρεβλώσουσιν ὡς καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς γραφὰς πρὸς τὴν ἴδιαν αὐτῶν ἀπώλειαν.

15 and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 speaking of this as he does in all his letters. **There are some things in them hard to understand,** which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures.

When Peter comments that some of the things in Paul’s letters are **hard to understand**, δυσνόητά τινα, his statement suggests difficult to interpret by οἱ ἀμαθεῖς καὶ ἀστήρικτοι, the uninstructed and unstable (v. 16), but not by those in tune with God and the apostolic Gospel.

The assertion of some of the content of Paul's letters being δυσνόητά literally means 'hard to interpret,' unless you are in tune with God.¹²¹ Paul appears to be a clear, excellent communicator of his ideas. Difficulty comes when his ideas are lifted out of context and given different meanings.

Paul's thoughts become difficult for the modern reader primarily because we don't take adequate time to understand the contextual setting in which they were first presented. The more we learn of this setting -- both historical and literary -- the clearer his thinking becomes.

What can we learn from this three letters coming out of ministry in the early 50s? It is helpful in answering such a question as this to first look at the Praescriptio and Proem expansion elements which signal foundational themes in the letter body.

From the Galatians Praescriptio (1:1-5) we are alerted to a major issue prompting the writing of the letter, i.e., the challenge to Paul's claim to being an apostle which then questioned the Gospel that he preached. He asserts the independence of his apostleship from human sources and authorizations (1:1) and summarizes the essence of his Gospel (1:4-5). Paul's claim to direct calling from God to preach the apostolic Gospel is then developed in 1:11-2:21.

What that means for us today is particularly important. When we read the letters of Paul we can know that we are reading the insights of one of the chosen Apostles who were given unique status and responsibility for establishing the Christian religion after the ascension of Jesus. To be even clearer, the Christian New Testament from start to finish is the apostolic witness to Jesus and His mission of discipling the world in commitment to Him as Savior. The Christian religion is grounded exclusively upon their testimony to Christ. As the source of thirteen of those twenty-seven docu-

¹²¹"δυσνόητά τινα ἂ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς καὶ ἀστήρικτοι στρεβλοῦσιν, 'some things that are hard to understand, which the uninstructed and unstable people distort.' δυσνόητος ('hard to understand') is a rare word, used of texts which are difficult to interpret (Diogenes Laertes, Vit. Phil. 9.13) and by Hermas of his symbolic visions (Herm. Sim. 9:14:4). It is no qualification of Paul's 'wisdom' (v 15) to admit that Paul's writings contain difficult passages, since it is only the ἀμαθεῖς καὶ ἀστήρικτοι ('uninstructed and unstable people') who will be liable to misinterpret them, and they also misinterpret the 'other scriptures' (see below; cf. Lindemann, Paulus, 94). The reference is probably therefore to passages which are liable to be misunderstood unless they are interpreted in the light of the rest of Paul's teaching and of the apostolic teaching generally, rather than to passages which are simply obscure. (The point is therefore different from that made by Origen, Comm. in. Rom. 6, who attributes the variety of interpretations of Paul to the fact that he was unable to express himself clearly.) For the correct interpretation of such passages some instruction in Christian teaching is required." [Richard J. Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 50, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 331.]

ments, the credibility of Paul as an apostolic witness is of paramount importance.

The heart of that Gospel is summarized in 1:4, κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ 4 τοῦ δόντος ἐαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἔξεληται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, *Lord Jesus Christ who gave Himself for our sins, so that He might rescue us from the age of the now present evil one according to the will of God even our Father.* This is the Gospel that Paul preached to the Galatians and that was the basis to their claim to being Christians.

The Exordium, as a replacement Proem, in 1:6-10 summarizes the dire situation among the churches in the province giving urgency to the writing of the letter and signaling what Paul will assert in 3:1-6:10. False teachers, most likely from the outside, had appeared raising serious questions about the correctness of the Gospel that Paul had preached to them. Their Jewish orientation could not accept the idea of salvation through justification by faith apart from Torah commitment, particularly for non-Jews. Paul vigorous defends salvation based exclusively upon faith surrender to Christ. This in no way opens a door to sinful living because in the Gospel the person is committed to the controlling leadership of the Holy Spirit (chap. 5) and out of this comes deep caring ministry to his fellow believers in living in obedience to Christ (chap. 6). It is the Judaizer's phony gospel that poses the danger because its placing of Torah demands upon the individual nullifies the freedom of the Holy Spirit to produce obedience to Christ.

Paul pleads then with the Galatian readers of this letter to remain firmly committed to the apostolic Gospel and to not modify or nullify it by shifting to the false gospel of the Judaizers.

At least a couple of important implications come out of this. For one thing, the apostolic Gospel must be correctly understood and preached. To preach and teach an alternative version to people is to doom them to eternal damnation. The Judaizers were so steeped in Torah understanding of life and relationship to God, that they could not, and did not, grasp the validity of the apostolic Gospel in its life transforming power. Also, Christ changes a person's life, not imposes new sets of rules. For Jews over many centuries, Torah meant the complete framing of one's life on a day to day basis. For non-Jews to come into God's salvation without commitment to Torah seemed impossible to them. But this was and is the radicalness of the apostolic Gospel: Christ becomes the defining framework of one's life, whether Jew or Gentile, completely separate from Torah (1:4). Properly understood Torah is not in conflict with Christ, but it can never substitute for Christ.

It is in this life changing faith surrender to the Lordship of Christ that the believer receives something far better than Torah. The very Spirit of Christ takes up residence in the person's life as the source of empowerment and guidance to live daily in obedience to God through Christ. Central to this will be a focus on brotherly love and ministry. The Christian community now replaces the synagogue community as the focus of living for and serving Christ. The superior nature of this kind of community to that offered by the synagogue is dramatically clear.

Paul's conviction was that when the Galatian believers understood what they already had in Christ, they would reject to counterfeit version being offered by the Judaizers. His letter attempted to spell this out clearly to them.

The challenge to us as believers in a modern world is to understand how the Gospel works like this in creating Christian communities. And then to commit ourselves to developing such communities. Central to this is the unconditional faith surrender to Christ that produces ongoing obedience to the Spirit of Christ in ministry to our brothers and sisters in the faith. Implicit also is a determination to fiercely resist any attempt to water down or pervert the apostolic Gospel that lays out this program.

When the apostle reached Athens in Achaia his concern for the newly formed churches in Macedonia weighed heavily on his mind while in this Greek city. Perhaps seeing the many idols in the city of Athens pressed him with the potential of paganism to corrupt and pervert human values and living. When Timothy and Silas arrived in the city from their ministry in Macedonia, he chose to write to the believers at Thessalonica and graciously thanked them for their marvelous commitment and steadfastness in service to the Lord in spite of the very hostile atmosphere against them in the city. They stood as a powerful validation of the Gospel he was preaching, and he thanked them profusely for this.

First Thessalonians represents a letter of pastoral joy from Paul to the church in the Macedonian city. The major focus of the letter, as signaled in the Proem, is on the solid faith commitment of the Thessalonians and how God is using that to inspire others to Christ. He sums it up in the Proem, v. 3, μνημονεύοντες ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, **remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Repeatedly through the letter body, he praises this church for its exemplary faith commitment. They illustrate a fundamental principle of Christianity: only a

serving faith is genuine. Interestingly, in Galatians Paul spoke extensively about the nature of Christian conversion and how it is to transform one's living, but due to the perverse influences hanging over the churches from the Judaizing teachers he spends little time emphasizing this as being exemplified by how the Galatians Christians were living. Just the opposite is the case with the Thessalonian church. These people fell in love with Christ from the outset of Paul's missionary activity there and that devotion to the Lord continued to deepen and develop consistently from then on.

In order to provide additional insight into the pattern of a devoted Christian life, the apostle includes some brief paraenetic guidelines in 4:1-12 and 5:12-22. But the nature of these do not suggest gaps or deficiencies in how the Thessalonians were already living. Instead, their general nature would allow them to be applied to any group of believers however mature in the faith they might be.

The one area where lack of clarity seemed to be present had to do with the return of Christ at the end of time (4:13-5:11). Paul does not provide new information to the congregation about this as he asserts in 5:1-2, 1 Περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν, ἀδελφοί, οὐ χρείαν ἔχετε ὑμῖν γράφεσθαι, 2 αὐτοὶ γὰρ ἀκριβῶς οἴδατε ὅτι ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτης ἐν νυκτὶ οὕτως ἔρχεται. 1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. As he will remind them in the second letter, these issues had already been discussed when he was first in their presence on the initial evangelizing visit: Οὐ μνημονεύετε ὅτι ἔτι ὧν πρὸς ὑμᾶς ταῦτα ἔλεγον ὑμῖν; **Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you?** (2:5).

For the non-Jews and perhaps for many of the Jews in the church, the idea of Christ as Messiah making a return trip to the world at the very end of time was a radically new religious idea. Even though Paul had explained the basics during his initial visit, confusion about the details remained. By the time of the second letter, some in the church mistakenly thought they had it down right and began teaching wrong ideas (2 Thess. 2:2). In 1 Thess. 4:13-18, the confusion included uncertainty about whether the gathering up of the church at Christ's return only included those living at the time. What about those who had died? Paul assured them that it made no difference. Everyone, both living and dead, would participate in His return. Another uncertainty was over how soon this might happen. In 5:1-11 Paul's emphasis was upon the 'unknowability' of when this would happen. He compared Christ's coming to the coming of a thief into a person's house at night. Conse-

quently, being continuously prepared for Christ's return is the bottom line.

How does all this apply to believers today? In general, what First Thessalonians teaches us is how the Christian life should be lived out day by day. The Thessalonian church both exemplified this and Paul's minimal supplementary admonitions provides some additional insight into the lifestyle of genuine Christianity. If we really want to know what Christianity is all about, we should read these sections in First Thessalonians where Paul praises the commitment of the Thessalonians, beginning with the Proem in chapter one.

After nearly two thousand years, many Christians have not yet gotten down correctly the idea of Christ's return. First Thessalonians assures us that when Christ returns all believers will participate whether living or dead at that moment in time. It reminds us of the uselessness and falseness and potential danger of trying to predict when this will take place. Paul's emphasis to the Thessalonians matches that of Jesus in the Little Apocalypse sections of the synoptic gospels: we must live in watchfulness for that day. And this means living in obedience to Him rather than speculating about when it will happen.

Second Thessalonians comes sometime later perhaps as much as two years. It also reflects the reporting of Timothy and Silas back to Paul on how things were in the church at Thessalonica. Just as the first letter praised the church for its faithfulness to Christ, so also does the second letter beginning with the Proem in 1:3-4 especially. This will then be expanded in scattered texts in the letter body, especially in 2:13-3:5.

While the one uncertainty at Thessalonica in the first letter was concerning the return of Christ, it continued to be a major concern by the time of the second letter a year or so later. But now the situation was somewhat different. A few in the church were sure that they understood Paul to say that the nearness of the end meant it was already beginning (2:2) as signaled by persecution. Paul refutes this not by the image of the thief in the night as in 1 Thes. 5:1-11, but now by indicating that the end of time would bring a level of persecution and opposition to Christianity far greater than what they had been experiencing since their conversion.

When believers are caught up in brutal harm and physical violence against them due to their religious faith, one can understand how easy it would be to think that the end is upon them and Christ is coming any minute. But Paul emphasizes to the Thessalonians that no, the end hasn't yet arrived. Opposition must intensify far worse than it is presently before Christ calls a halt to it and sets in motion the eternal order of things. Here in the second letter he refuses to speculate about

the timing of all this and reprimands those in the Thessalonian church for doing so. Speculation about it has led to idleness, which is sinful and contrary to the will of God (3:6-15). His earlier view that consistent obedience is the only way to prepare remains intact in the second letter.

Only if believers caught up in speculating about Christ's return could hear Paul's reprimand today. It is not productive and turns attention away from the important matters of obeying Christ in ministry to others.

In summation, what comes out of the early writing ministry on the second missionary journey is a series of declarations about the basics of Christian conversion and Christian commitment in daily living, plus reaffirmation of the teachings of Jesus about the second coming of Christ at the end of time. Although in different ways, the emphasis upon conversion and Christian commitment came out of different circumstances between Galatians and the two letters to the Thessalonians. They are similar emphases but worded differently in order to meet very different spiritual needs in the two sets of congregations in Galatians and Thessalonians. Paul therefore applied the Gospel in different ways in order to meet these distinctive needs. At Thessalonica the issue of the second coming of Christ was the distinctive concern, most likely due to the pressure of ongoing persecution from both the Jewish synagogue and the governing authorities. The issue at Thessalonica evolved from 'lack of understanding' to 'incorrect understanding' between the two letters. Paul corrected both in the two separate letters. No issue of heresy seems to have been present in either situation.

We have much that we can therefore learn from these first three letters.