

Pauline Epistles

Paul's 14 epistles found in our present New Testament were written to members of the Church who already had some knowledge of the gospel. They are not evangelistic; rather, they are regulatory in nature. The arrangement is neither chronological, geographical, nor alphabetical, but by length, in descending order from the longest (Romans) to the shortest (Philemon). This is the case except with the epistle to the Hebrews, which was placed last because some have questioned whether or not it was written by Paul. The dating and chronological grouping of the epistles as presented below is approximate but seems consistent with the known facts.

An advantage in studying the epistles in chronological order is that the reader sees the differences in the types of problems the Church encountered as the years passed and circumstances changed. Early membership was mostly Jewish, and problems included questions about the law of Moses. Later, when the gentile membership had increased, problems involved items of Greek philosophy. Early persecution was from the Jews and the Judaizers. Later persecution came from the Roman government. These things are visible in the epistles not by sharp distinction, but by the gradual shift of emphasis.

Paul's epistles may be divided into four groups:

1. 1 and 2 Thes. (A.D. 50, 51)
2. 1 and 2 Cor., Gal., Rom. (A.D. 55, 57)
3. Philip., Col., Eph., Philem., Heb. (A.D. 60, 62)
4. Titus, 1 and 2 Tim. (A.D. 64, 65)

I. 1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS

Epistles to the Thessalonians

These epistles were written from Corinth during Paul's first visit to Europe. His work in Thessalonica is described in Acts 17. It was his wish to return, but he was unable to do so (1 Thes. 2:18); he therefore sent Timothy to cheer the converts and bring him word how they fared. The first epistle is the outcome of his thankfulness on Timothy's return.

Analysis of 1 Thessalonians

1. Personal: (a) Salutation and thanksgiving (1:1–10). (b) Reminder of his work among them, and fresh thanksgiving (2:1–16). (c) His anxiety on their behalf and his reason for sending Timothy (2:17–3:10). (d) A prayer for them (3:11–13).

2. Instruction: (a) Exhortation about spiritual growth, chastity, love, and diligence (4:1–12). (b) Doctrine of the second advent, for the consolation of the bereaved (4:13–18), and for the warning and edification of survivors (5:1–11). (c) Exhortations to laity, clergy, and the whole church (5:12–28).

In the short interval between the two epistles the Church suffered from persecution (2 Thes. 1:4); the prospect of an immediate return of the Lord fostered an unhealthy excitement (2:2) and seemed to countenance improvident idleness (3:6), while Paul's own teaching had been misunderstood (3:17).

Analysis of 2 Thessalonians

1. Salutation and thanksgiving (1:1–10).
2. A prayer (1:11–12).
3. Teaching about the second advent; the Lord not to come immediately (2:1–12).
4. Thanksgiving, an appeal to stand firm, and a prayer (2:13–17).
5. Prayer for himself and his converts (3:1–5).
6. Duty of subordination and of work (3:6–16).
7. Conclusion (3:17–18).

II. 1 AND 2 CORINTHIANS, GALATIANS, ROMANS

These epistles were written between A.D. 55 and 56; 1 Cor. toward the end of Paul's three years' stay at Ephesus, 2 Cor. and perhaps Gal. during his journey through Macedonia; and Rom. from Corinth.

Epistles to the Corinthians

Corinth was the meeting point of many nationalities because the main current of the trade between Asia and western Europe passed through its harbors. Paul's first visit lasted nearly two years; his converts were mainly Greeks, gifted with a keen sense of the joys of physical existence, a passion for freedom, and a genius for rhetoric and logic, but reared in the midst of the grossest moral corruption, undisciplined and self-conceited. Some time before 1 Cor. was written he paid them a second visit (2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1) to check some rising disorder (2 Cor. 2:1; 13:2) and wrote them a letter, now lost (1 Cor. 5:9). They had also been visited by Apollos (Acts 18:27), perhaps by Peter (1 Cor. 1:12), and by some Jewish Christians who brought with them letters of commendation from Jerusalem (1 Cor. 1:12; 2 Cor. 3:1; 5:16; 11:23).

Analysis of 1 Corinthians

1. Salutation and thanksgiving (1:1–9).

2. Rebuke of the Corinthian church for lack of unity (1:10–6:20): (a) The spirit of partisanship and insubordination (1:10–4:21). (b) The case of impurity (5:1–13; 6:9–20). (c) The lawsuits (6:1–9).
3. Paul's reply to inquiries made by them as to: (a) Marriage (7:1–40). (b) Meat offered to idols (8:1–11:1). (c) The order of worship, with special reference to the Lord's Supper and the use of spiritual gifts (11:2–14:40). This section contains a magnificent description of love (12:31–13:13), the greatest in the trio of things that abide forever.
4. Doctrine of the Resurrection: (a) Of Christ (15:1–19). (b) Of the dead (15:20–34). (c) Degrees of glory (15:35–58).
5. Directions about a collection for the Christian poor at Jerusalem; information about Paul's, Timothy's, and Apollos's plans; final exhortations and salutation (16:1–24).

Soon after writing the first epistle Paul was driven from Ephesus by a riot (Acts 19). In Macedonia he met Titus (2 Cor. 7:6), who brought him news from Corinth that his letter had been well received and had produced the desired effect; the Church had cleared itself of all complicity in a sexual offense and had excommunicated the offender (2:5–11). But Paul found that a personal coolness had sprung up between himself and his converts (7:2; 12:15), which unscrupulous opponents were turning to their own account.

Analysis of 2 Corinthians

1. Salutation and thanksgiving (1:1–11).
2. Personal, arising out of the report of Titus: (a) His own movements and feelings toward the Corinthian church (1:12–2:17). (b) The characteristics of the Christian ministry as exemplified by true Apostles (3:1–6:10). (c) An account of the impression produced on his own mind by the report of Titus (6:11–7:16).
3. Welfare collection for the churches of Judea (8:1–9:15).
4. Assertion of his own position as an Apostle (10:1–12:10).
5. Conclusion (12:11–13:14).

Epistle to the Galatians

There is some uncertainty as to what churches were addressed in this epistle. They were either in northern Galatia, the district of which Ancyra was capital, or in the district on the borders of Phrygia and Galatia that was visited by Paul on his first missionary journey. In either case the Galatian churches were certainly visited by Paul on his second (Acts 16:6) and third (Acts 18:23) journeys. (See *Galatia*.) The epistle was written by him (probably while traveling through Macedonia) at the news of a wholesale defection from the truth of the gospel in favor of a return to the bondage of

the Jewish law. In the epistle he vindicates his own position as an Apostle, enunciates the doctrine of righteousness by faith, and affirms the value of spiritual religion as opposed to a religion of externals.

Analysis of Galatians

1. Salutation and expression of regret at the news he had received (1:1–10).
2. Personal: a vindication of his own position as an Apostle; his relationship with other Apostles (1:11–2:21).
3. Theological, showing the superiority of the doctrine of faith to the doctrine of merit by works (3:1–4:31): (a) Appeal to their own experience of the Christian life (3:1–6). (b) The faith of Abraham; faith in Jesus Christ enables believers to become Abraham's seed (3:1–29). (c) The purpose of the law and its preparatory function (4:1–11). (d) A personal appeal (4:12–20). (e) Allegory of Isaac and Ishmael (4:21–31).
4. Practical results of the doctrine of faith (5:1–6:10): (a) A return of Judaism a denial of Christian liberty (5:1–12). (b) Liberty did not mean freedom from moral restraint (5:13–26). (c) Duty of sympathy and liberality (6:1–10).
5. Autograph postscript (6:11–18).

Epistle to the Romans

This epistle was written from Corinth toward the end of the stay recorded in Acts 20:3. Paul was then contemplating a visit to Jerusalem, which was certain to be dangerous (Rom. 15:31). If he escaped with his life he hoped afterwards to visit Rome. The letter was meant in part to prepare the Church there to receive him when he came. It may also be regarded as containing a statement of doctrines that had been in dispute with the Judaizing Christians and that Paul now regarded as finally established.

Analysis of Romans

1. Salutation and thanksgiving (1:1–15).
2. Doctrinal (1:16–11:36): (a) His main thesis, the doctrine of righteousness by faith (1:16–17). (b) Such a doctrine met a crying need of the whole world, for God's wrath against sin was only too evident, and this included both Jew and Gentile (1:18–2:29). (c) The Jew's position of privilege (3:1–8; see also Rom. 9). (d) Jew and Gentile shown from scripture to be alike under sin (3:9–20). (e) Righteousness by faith now made possible and all boasting excluded (3:21–31). (f) Illustration of the doctrine from the case of Abraham (4:1–25). (g) Joy through the Lord Jesus (5:1–11). (h) The first and the second Adam (5:12–19). (i) The moral consequences of our deliverance, namely, union with Christ, release from sin, and life in the Spirit (5:20–8:39). (j) Israel's rejection, the reason for it (9:1–10:21), yet not final (11:1–36).

3. Practical exhortations: (a) The duty of holiness of life and the law of love (12:1–13:14). (b) The treatment of weaker brethren (14:1–15:13).
4. Personal: (a) His reasons for writing (15:14–33). (b) Greetings (16:1–23). (c) Benediction and praise to the Lord (16:24–27).

Characteristics of the Second Group

These four epistles illustrate a new stage in the apostolic teaching. A great controversy had arisen as to the necessity of obedience to the Mosaic law. Although the matter had been settled theologically at the Jerusalem conference in about A.D. 50 (Acts 15; Gal. 2:1–10), it took a long time to settle the matter culturally in the lives of many Church members. Many still looked upon the Church as a subdivision or an outgrowth of Judaism, and they saw no need to discontinue the ordinances of the law of Moses when they became members of the Christian Church. To them Christianity was something new, while the law was undoubtedly of divine appointment and approved by the example of generations of faithful Israelites. In the controversy Paul took a leading part, and in these four epistles he points men to the cross of Christ as the only source of eternal life (compare Mosiah 12:27–16:15). The epistles to the Romans and Galatians were the inspired writings most appealed to by the Reformation of the 16th century because they emphasize the spirit over legal formalism.

III. PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, EPHESIANS, PHILEMON, HEBREWS

These are separated from the previous group by an interval of four or five years, spent by Paul almost entirely in captivity. They were all written from Rome.

Epistle to the Philippians

The church at Philippi was the earliest founded by Paul in Europe (Acts 16:11–40). His first visit ended abruptly, but he was not forgotten, and his converts sent him supplies not only while he remained in the neighborhood, but also after he had moved on to Corinth (Philip. 4:15–16). He passed through Philippi six years later (Acts 20:2) on his way from Ephesus to Corinth, and again on his return (Acts 20:6) from Corinth to Jerusalem. When the news of his removal to Rome reached the Philippians, they sent one of their number, Epaphroditus (Philip. 2:25), to minister to him in their name. The strain of work in the capital proved too severe, and Epaphroditus had to be sent home (2:26–30), taking with him the epistle to the Philippians. Its main purpose is to express Paul's gratitude and affection, and to cheer them under the disappointment of his protracted imprisonment.

Analysis of Philippians

1. Salutation, thanksgiving, and prayer on their behalf (1:1–11).
2. Personal: dealing with the progress of the missionary work (1:12–26).
3. Exhortation to unity, humility, and perseverance (2:1–18).
4. Paul's own plans, and those of Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19–30).
5. Warning against false teachers (3:1–4:9).
6. Thanks for their assistance, and conclusion (4:10–23).

Epistle to the Colossians

This epistle was the result of a visit from Epaphras, the evangelist of the Church in Colosse (1:7–8), who reported that the Colossians were falling into serious error, the result of a deep consciousness of sin leading to a desire to attain moral perfection by mechanical means, the careful observance of external ordinances (2:16) and ascetic restrictions (2:20), coupled with special devotion to a host of angelic mediators. The attractiveness of such teaching was due not only to the satisfaction it offered to the craving after sanctification, but also to the show it made of superior wisdom and greater insight into the mysteries of the universe. Paul shows that Christ, in His own person, is the one principle of the unity of the universe, and that sanctification is to be found only through union with Him.

Analysis of Colossians

1. Salutation, thanksgiving, and prayer (1:1–13).
2. Doctrinal: (a) Christ, our Redeemer, the author and goal of all creation, the Lord of all divine perfection, in whom is the reconciliation of the universe (1:14–2:5). (b) Hence the importance of union with Him (2:6–12). (c) Danger of ceremonialism and of angel worship (2:13–19). (d) Importance of dying and rising again with Christ (2:20–3:4).
3. Exhortation: (a) Every evil inclination to be subdued (3:5–11). (b) We must clothe ourselves in all graces of the Spirit (3:12–17). (c) Social duties to be observed (3:18–4:6).
4. Personal: commendations and greetings (4:7–18).

Epistle to the Ephesians

This epistle was carried by the same messenger who bore the Colossians' letter. The epistle is of great importance, for it contains Paul's teaching regarding the Church of Christ.

Analysis of Ephesians

1. Salutation (1:1–2).
2. Doctrinal, the Church of Christ: (a) Thanksgiving for blessings bestowed in Christ (1:3–14), and prayer for the further enlightenment of his converts (1:15–2:10). (b) The change in their state: once aliens, now fellow-citizens of the saints, Gentile and Jew henceforth united in one Church (2:11–22), a mystery now revealed (3:1–12). (c) Prayer and thanksgiving (3:13–21).
3. Practical exhortation: (a) Necessity of unity (4:1–6), each developing his own gift for the good of the whole; role of apostles and prophets in the Church (4:7–16). (b) The new man (4:17–5:21). (c) Teaching about marriage, children, and servants (5:22–6:9). (d) The Christian armor (6:10–20).
4. Reference to Tychicus (6:21–22); blessing (6:23–24).

Epistle to Philemon

This epistle is a private letter about Onesimus, a slave who had robbed his master, Philemon, and run away to Rome. Paul sent him back to his master at Colosse in company with Tychicus the bearer of the epistle to the Colossians. Paul asks that Onesimus be forgiven and received back as a fellow Christian.

Epistle to the Hebrews

This epistle was written to Jewish members of the Church to persuade them that significant aspects of the law of Moses, as a forerunner, had been fulfilled in Christ and that the higher gospel law of Christ had replaced it. When Paul returned to Jerusalem at the end of his third mission (about A.D. 60), he found that many thousands of Jewish members of the Church were still “zealous of the law” of Moses (Acts 21:20). This was at least 10 years after the conference at Jerusalem had determined that certain ordinances of the law of Moses were not necessary for the salvation of gentile Christians but had not settled the matter for Jewish Christians. It appears that soon thereafter, Paul wrote the epistle to the Hebrews to show them by their own scripture and by sound reason why they should no longer practice the law of Moses. The epistle is built on a carefully worked-out plan. Some have felt that the literary style is different from that of Paul’s other letters. However, the ideas are certainly Paul’s.

Analysis of Hebrews

1. God has spoken to our fathers for centuries by means of prophets, but in our time He has sent His son Jesus, who is the heir and the Creator and the exact image of the Father (Heb. 1:1–3).

2. Superiority of Jesus: (a) Jesus is greater than the angels. He has a more excellent name, inheritance, and higher calling. They are servants; He is the Son (1:4–2:18). (b) If the word of angels is important, how much “more earnest heed” we ought to give to the things spoken by the Lord (Jesus) (2:1–4).
3. Jesus is greater than Moses. Moses was a faithful servant, but Jesus was a faithful son (3:1–6).
4. The superiority of Jesus’ word: (a) The Israelites while traveling through the wilderness could not enter into the promised land because they did not believe and obey the teachings of God received through Moses (3:7–19). (b) How much more important it is, therefore, to obey the words of Jesus who is greater than Moses, if we wish to enter the heavenly land (4:1–2).
5. Jesus, as a high priest of Melchizedek, is superior to the high priests of the law of Moses: (a) Jesus was of the order of Melchizedek, which is greater than the order of Aaron. Melchizedek was even greater than Abraham (7:1–12). (b) The law of the Melchizedek Priesthood (gospel) is greater than the law of the Aaronic Priesthood (law of Moses) (5:1–7:28).
6. The tabernacle service was symbolic (or a shadow) of the real events: (a) The high priest under the law went through the veil into the Holy of Holies; but Jesus, the great high priest, has gone into heaven itself (6:19–20; 9:1–14). (b) The traveling of Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness, crossing over the Jordan River into the promised land, is similar to a man forsaking the worldly things, going through the wilderness of temptation, and finally passing through the veil of death into the celestial kingdom (D&C 84:21–24; see also Alma 37:38–45).
7. The first covenant (testament) under Moses was fulfilled, and Jesus brought a new covenant (testament); thus we have in the Bible the Old and New Testaments (8:6–9:28). That which is therefore fulfilled and is old “is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13).
8. Exhortation to faithfulness and diligence (10:1–39).
9. A discourse on faith (11:1–40).
10. Admonitions and greetings (12:1–13:25).

Characteristics of the Third Group

The characteristic doctrine of this third group is the Ascension and present sovereignty of Jesus Christ over the world and the Church. Problems of thought and of action pressed for solution. The gospel is shown to be the guide to a true philosophy, as well as to possess the power to produce right conduct and to satisfy the social as well as the individual needs of men.

IV. TITUS, 1 AND 2 TIMOTHY

These epistles, known as the pastoral epistles, deal mainly with questions relating to the internal discipline and organization of the Church and with the ideal of the pastoral office. We learn from them that Paul was set free from his first imprisonment in Rome and revisited his old friends in Greece and Asia Minor. During this interval of freedom 1 Tim. and the epistle to Titus were written.

1 Timothy

In the course of his travels after his first imprisonment Paul came to Ephesus, where he left Timothy to check the growth of certain unprofitable forms of speculation, intending (3:14) afterwards to return. As a delay might occur, he writes to him, perhaps from Macedonia (1:3), to give him counsel and encouragement in the fulfillment of his duty. See also *Timothy*.

Analysis of 1 Timothy

1. Salutation (1:1–2).
2. Foolish speculations and legalism to be kept in check as dangerous to the simplicity of the gospel (1:3–20).
3. Directions about public worship, and about the character and conduct of ministers (2:1–3:13).
4. Summary of the true believer's creed (3:14–16).
5. Warning against foolish asceticism (4:1–16).
6. Hints to Timothy about the treatment of his flock (5:1–6:2).
7. Warnings against various dangers (6:3–19).
8. Conclusion (6:20–21).

Epistle to Titus

See also *Titus*.

Analysis of Titus

1. Salutation (1:1–4).
2. Qualifications of an elder (1:5–9).
3. Discipline in the Cretan church (1:10–16).
4. Proper treatment of various classes of Christians (2:1–15).
5. General exhortation (3:1–11).

6. Personal messages (3:12–15).

2 Timothy

This epistle was written during Paul's second imprisonment, shortly before his martyrdom. It contains the Apostle's last words and shows the wonderful courage and trust with which he faced death.

Analysis of 2 Timothy

1. Salutation (1:1–2).
2. Charge to Timothy (1:3–14).
3. The desertion by old friends, and the faithfulness of others (1:15–18).
4. Various warnings and directions (2:1–26).
5. Dangers ahead and how to meet them (3:1–4:5).
6. Paul's confidence in the face of death (4:6–8).
7. A message to friends (4:9–21).

Characteristics of the Fourth Group

The pastoral epistles, being addressed to men engaged in the ministry of the Church, are occupied mainly with questions relating to the internal discipline and organization of the Church and with the ideal of the pastoral office. The development and training of the life of godliness have taken the place of instruction in the faith. At the same time it is striking to notice the way in which Paul emphasizes the universality of God's saving purpose (1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; 3:4), and the bounty shines out in every part of His creation (1 Tim. 4:4; 6:13, 17).

Summary: It is from Paul's writings that we learn the most about the New Testament Church, but it must be remembered that they were written for the use of men who were already members of the Church. The New Testament presupposes on the part of its readers at least an elementary knowledge of gospel truth. Paul's life is characterized by an extraordinary zeal for the Lord. His greatest contribution is what he tells us about Jesus.