

INTRODUCTION TO PAUL'S EPISTLES

PAULINE EPISTLES

Before delving into Romans, a basic overview of Paul's epistles is in order. Epistles are letters, which was a common form of communication in the 1st century. Paul wrote his letters to encourage, warn, & instruct:

- Churches he'd started (1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians)
- Churches he'd not visited (Romans, Colossians)
- Individuals (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon)



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Epistle outline:

Grace.

I thank God whenever I remember you.

Hold fast to the gospel.

For the love of everything holy, stop being stupid.

Timothy says hi.

... There is a pattern to Paul's letters – all letters of that era, really.

- **Introduction** – identifies self, names recipients, & greetings
- **Thanksgiving & intercession** for the readers
- **Body of the letter** – For Paul, doctrinal questions & applications to life
- **Closing** – greetings from companions, added greetings to people in the church
- **Benediction**

However, Paul's greetings are unique. The normal Greek greeting was similar to their word for "grace." "Peace" was the standard Jewish greeting. Paul combines the two in a specifically Christian form: "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:3). God's grace in Christ brings reconciliation with God, harmony among people, and wholeness of life.

Paul reveals his heart and burden for recipients of the letter through his thanksgivings for their spiritual progress (e.g., 1 Thess. 1:2-10) and his intercessions for their continued growth (Phil. 1:8-11). In Galatians, Paul bypasses the standard thanksgiving and intercession and goes directly to the problem at hand: concern that his converts will follow false teachers.

Paul's letters cover both doctrinal and practical issues. In Romans, he begins with doctrinal discussion (Rom. 1:16-11:36), then follows with practical application (Rom. 12:1-15:32). Philippians, on the other hand, doctrinal discussion & practical application are mixed together. Paul seems to be answering a series of questions sent to him from Corinth as he writes 1 Corinthians.

The last three letters written by Paul (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus) are known as the Pastoral Epistles because they deal with matters pertaining to pastors and their congregations. 1 Timothy & Titus are our earliest guides to church organization and are noted for their lists of qualifications of pastors and deacons in the early church. All three of these epistles emphasize sound doctrine and challenge believers to good works.

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Paul's closing benedictions always include a wish for God's grace to be with his readers: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all" (Rom. 16:24; 1 Cor. 16:23; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18). He begins and ends with the unspeakable gift of God's grace in Christ.

PAUL'S INFLUENCE

The witness of Paul began early in Damascus & Tarsus, the city of his birth. Missionary travels then took him throughout the provinces of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia. Even while under custody in Caesarea & imprisoned in Rome, Paul testified of his salvation in Christ.

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS



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TIMELINE OF PAUL'S EPISTLES

