

## ***Pauline Letter Structure***

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**Pella, Iowa**

***Much thanks must be given to Dr. Jeff Weima from Calvin Seminary. The materials for this presentation are taken from class notes which I took back in 1997-98 and from a PowerPoint presentation he has done on Pauline Letter Structure. The materials are used with his permission.***

## **Letter Structure Today**

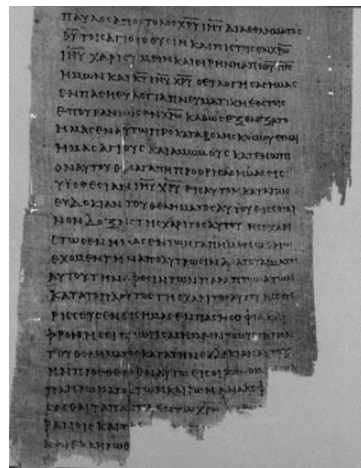
- Thank you letters
- Cover letters
- Love letters
- Referral letters
- Business letters
- Apology letters
- Sympathy letters

## Why is Paul's Letter Structure Important To Understand?

*Once we understand Paul's letter writing conventions, it helps us to understand his letters better, interpret them more clearly, and apply them accurately to our lives today.*

## Form of Paul's Letters

- The Letter Opening
- The Thanksgiving
- The Letter Body
- The Letter Closing



## **Introduction of the Letter**

### **The Letter Opening**

- **Identification of sender**

*Paul, Silas and Timothy,*

- II Thessalonians 1:1a

## **Introduction of the Letter**

### **The Letter Opening**

- Titles in which Paul refers to himself.

- Servant
- An Apostle
- A Prisoner

## **Introduction of the Letter**

### **The Letter Opening**

- Co-sender
  - In ancient secular letters co-senders occur sometimes in business or official letters but rarely in personal or familial letters.

## **Introduction of the Letter**

### **The Letter Opening**

- **Identification of sender**
- **Designation of recipient**

*To the church of the  
Thessalonians in God our  
Father and the Lord Jesus  
Christ: - II Thessalonians 1:1b*

## **Introduction of the Letter**

### **The Letter Opening**

- **Identification of Sender**
- **Designation of Recipient**
- **The Greeting**

*Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. - II Thessalonians 1:2*

## **Introduction of the Letter**

### **The Letter Opening**

- **The Greeting**
  - "Grace and peace"
  - Greek letters of that day typically opened with the word **chairein** literally meaning "rejoice" but everyday speech was a greeting.

## Introduction of the Letter

### The Letter Opening

#### • The Greeting

- Paul apparently "christianizes" the secular Greek greeting of **caivrein** "rejoice" into the Christian greeting **cavri~** "grace".
- "Peace" is taken from the typical Jewish greeting *shalom*, used not only in speech but found also in Semitic letters.
- Paul seems to be incorporating in a unique way a typically Greek greeting and a typically Jewish greeting.

## Introduction of the Letter

### The Letter Opening

#### • The Greeting

– *Divine Source*

- "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."
- found in all letters (except Colossians which has only "from God our Father")

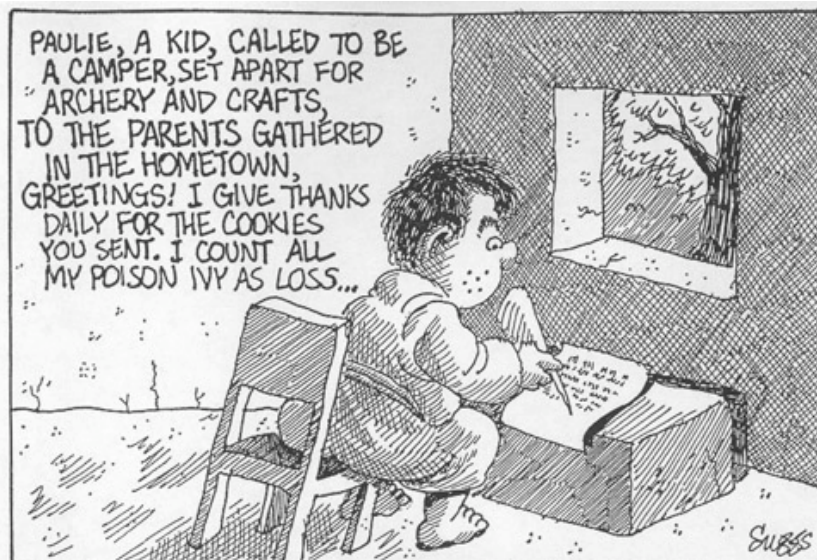
## The Thanksgiving Section

### The Thanksgiving Section

- II Thessalonians 1:3-12

Q: What is a thanksgiving section?

A: A distinct epistolary unit in Paul's letters, located between the letter opening and letter body, in which Paul gives thanks to God for the believers to whom he is writing.



YOUNG PAUL WRITES AN EPISTLE FROM CAMP

## **The Thanksgiving Section**

### **The Function of the Thanksgiving Section**

- **Pastoral function**
- **The challenge function**
- **Foreshadowing function**

## **The Body of the Letter**

### **A.The Disclosure of the Problem**

*Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. - II Thessalonians 2:1-2*

## **The Body of the Letter**

### **A. The Disclosure of the Problem**

### **B. The Appeal**

*So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.*

- II Thessalonians 2:15

## **The Body of the Letter**

### **A. The Disclosure of the Problem**

### **B. The Appeal**

### **C. The Now About Sections**

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

- I Thessalonians 5:1-2

## **The Body of the Letter**

### **D. The Confidence Section**

*We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.*

- II Thessalonians 3:4-5

## **The Body of the Letter**

### **E. The Exhortation Section**

*In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.*

- II Thessalonians 3:6-9

## **The Letter Closing**

### **A.The Peace Benediction**

*Now may the Lord of peace  
himself give you peace at all  
times and in every way.*

- II Thessalonians 3:16a

## **The Letter Closing**

### **A.The Peace Benediction**

### **B.The Final Greetings**

*The Lord be with all of you.*

- II Thessalonians 3:16b

## **The Letter Closing**

### **A.The Peace Benediction**

### **B.The Final Greetings**

### **C.The Autograph**

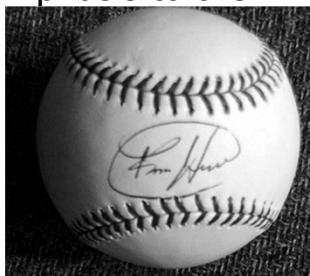
*I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.*

- II Thessalonians 3:17

## **The Letter Closing**

### **C.The Autograph**

The autograph was a fixed literary custom of Greco-Roman letters to indicate commitment of author to its contents. Paul somewhat similarly uses the autograph to add emphasis to the content of his letters.



## **The Letter Closing**

### **D.The Final Exhortation**

- *Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.*  
– *I Thesssalonians 5:25-26*

## **The Letter Closing**

### **D.The Final Exhortation**

- *Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace.*  
– *II Corinthians 11:13*

## **The Letter Closing**

### **D.The Final Exhortation**

- *After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea. Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.*

*– Colossians 4:16-17*

## **The Letter Closing**

### **A.The Peace Benediction**

### **B.The Final Greetings**

### **C.The Autograph**

### **D.The Final Exhortation**

### **E.The Grace Benediction**

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

*- II Thessalonians 3:18*

## **The Letter Closing**

**A.The Peace Benediction**

**B.The Final Greetings**

**C.The Autograph**

**D.The Final Exhortation**

**E.The Grace Benediction**

**F.The Greetings**

## **The Letter Closing**

### **F. The Greetings**

- The closing greetings are not to be confused with the opening greeting: "Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ."

## **The Letter Closing**

### **F. The Greetings**

- These greetings function to maintain or even establish Paul's relationship with the readers.

## **The Letter Closing**

### **F. The Greetings**

- All closing greetings use verb "I greet" as in secular letters. The greetings can be divided up according to subject of the verb:

## The Letter Closing

### F.The Greetings

1. First-Person Type: "I greet..."; only in Rom 16:22 with greeting of the letter writer, Tertius.
2. Second-Person Type: "Greet...!"; a command from Paul that his readers greet others on Paul's behalf.
3. Third-Person Type: "So-and-so greets you"; Paul passes on greetings of some 3rd party with him to his readers.

## Any Questions?

