

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: A STUDY OF THE CHURCH EPISTLES: THE AUTHOR,

THE WRITER, AND THE WORKS

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In studying the literary aspects of the Bible, some of the least appreciated and most neglected works are the epistles written by the Apostle Paul. The Pauline epistles, particularly the Church Epistles, warrant further investigation with regard to style. The Bible is a tapestry of stylistic diversity. Inspiration is the golden thread which makes the work unique. Paul comments on the source behind the writing of the Scriptures, acknowledging God as author and himself as one of the writers. The author inspires the writer by means of revelation, and the writer then relates the message in his own inimitable style.

Style, succinctly defined as "the man himself," is reflected in Paul's voice, his imagery, his syntax and his structure. The Apostle opens the first epistle with "Paul,

a servant of Jesus Christ. . . ." His voice as a "bond slave" echoes throughout the epistles. Paul's varied imagery reveals a well-travelled and versatile individual. Paul's Semitic background is also reflected in the syntax. Furthermore, each epistle is structured and arranged for a particular audience.

The extensive use of the epistle as a literary genre indicates that it is by no means a novel means of communication. The Apostle Paul, however, modifies the epistolary format in an innovative manner to suit his specific purposes. From the opening salutation through the final benediction, Paul modifies the introduction, body, and conclusion, leaving his original signature on each work. Because of Paul's adaptation of a contemporary literary form, an analysis of the Church Epistles is certainly justified. Such an examination provides a wider understanding and greater appreciation of the major works of the New Testament.

In examining the works as a whole, one notices striking parallels in the arrangement of the epistles as doctrinal, reproof, or correctional. Six of the seven epistles from Romans through Thessalonians can be divided into two groups of three: an initial doctrinal epistle followed by a reproof epistle which corrects the practical error because the initial doctrine was not adhered to and finally a correctional epistle written because the erroneous

practices have become doctrine. The last epistle of the seven, while written first chronologically, is placed in the last position of the collection because of its message, the return of Christ, the culmination of the Church of Grace. Whether viewed collectively or individually, the Church Epistles provide a brilliant display of the literary style of one of the most influential writers of all time.

A STUDY OF THE CHURCH EPISTLES:
THE AUTHOR, THE WRITER, AND THE WORKS

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PREFACE

No other book has had more profound impact upon my life than the Bible. For the past eleven years I have read and studied the Bible more than any other work. My focus has been primarily upon the practical application of the scriptures which I have accepted as my standard for living. The Word of God has become the touchstone for every decision, the compass to direct my steps and guide my thoughts. While emphasizing the content of God's Word, I have not always been aware of its inherent literary beauty.

To broaden my awareness of the literary aspects of the Scriptures, I chose to analyze the style of the Apostle Paul as revealed in the Church Epistles. These works have served as a foundation for my practical study, and I desired to become more aware of the literary principles which contribute to their greatness. As a result of this project, the eyes of my understanding have been enlightened with a fuller appreciation of the matchless literary artistry of seven of the epistles written by Paul.

I would like to acknowledge the editorial assistance and direction of Dr. Gerrit W. Bleeker. My appreciation also goes to Dr. Jeremy Wild for his insightful recommendations.

I am particularly grateful for Dr. Victor Paul Wierwille, who inspired a deep love and profound respect for the Word of God and its study. Finally, I am thankful for my wife, Brenda, whose support, encouragement and assistance immeasurably helped to make possible this labor of love.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Writings of Paul in Relation to the New Testament

Christianity has been essentially a way of life centered around a book. Not only has the book served as a practical guide to daily living, it continues to serve as a magnificent example of the finest literature in the English language. The literature of the New Testament is particularly diverse, employing various literary forms used by Greek and Romans during the period of its writing.¹ Wilder, however, points out the uniqueness of the New Testament.

None of the New Testament writings could be identified as 'literature' as then understood in the Roman Empire. According to Franz Overbek, primitive Christian writings from 50-160 A.D. fall outside the history of literature. The Christian forms have to be studied for themselves.²

Because the New Testament unfolded as a literary work, a work written in Greek, it was compared to the ancient Greek works. Since the writings of the New Testament differed considerably from the classical Greek forms,

¹ Nigel Turner, Style, Vol. 4 of A Grammar of New Testament Greek, ed. James Hope Moulton, p. 82.

² Amos N. Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel, p. 36.

which were often artificial or "literary" by design, traditional classical standards were found to be unsuitable as measuring rods.³ When compared with the stylistically "literary" Greek of the ancients, the New Testament, with its "non-literary" Koine Greek, was often looked upon unfavorably by classical scholars.⁴

The works of classical antiquity, however, do not approach the sensitivity and depth of the early Christian writings. The beauty and vibrancy of Paul's writings, for instance, lie precisely in their simplicity and naturalness; in their poignancy and pointedness; indeed, in their overall honesty and artlessness. The great part of the New Testament is not artistic prose, but "artless, popular prose" which often excels the artificially constructed and contrived empty rhetoric of the period. Paul does not speak in the language of Homer and the epic poets, nor of Euripides and the tragedians, nor of Demosthenes and the classic orators. Rather he speaks in common idiom directly to the heart of the common man in words he can understand.⁵

Deissmann was instrumental in eliminating classical literary models for the study of the New Testament by advocating the analysis of these writings on their own merits.

³Wilder, p. 36.

⁴William G. Doty, "The Classification of Epistolary Literature," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 31 (1969), 187.

⁵Doty, p. 187.

The German Biblical scholar turned from the standards discussed by classicists to the ordinary aspects of life reflected in the lives of the original recipients of the writings. He investigated various documents--papyri, ostraca, and inscriptions of every sort--in order to gain insight into "the living roots of Christianity in their native soil . . . the lower ranks of society."⁶

In endeavoring to show the unsurpassed excellence of the Bible, Deissmann and other scholars have also shown that the prose of the New Testament falls into a literary category all its own. As a distinctive piece of literature the New Testament is unsurpassed in its masterfully constructed prose. Harrison praises the magnificence of the Bible: ". . . If you care to know the best that our literature can give in simple noble prose--mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures in the English tongue."⁷

Gardiner discusses the Bible as the ultimate standard of English prose, citing its style as the apex of an arch, most necessary, yet the highest point. He points to the Bible's directness of statement, its simplicity of words, and its dignity and moving rhythm. Gardiner advocates an intimate acquaintance with the King James Version

⁶Doty, p. 187.

⁷Lane Cooper, Theories of Style with Special Reference to Prose Composition--Essays, Excerpts and Translations, p. 452.

of the Bible as the best possible study of English literature.⁸ Lowes also characterizes Biblical style by its "vigor and pithiness of phrase, as well as its nobility of diction and rhythmic quality which is unrivalled in its beauty."⁹ Certainly Paul's style as writer of the Church Epistles reflects these descriptions.

Both Gardiner and Lowes praise the stylistic beauty of the Bible as particularly displayed in the King James Version. Gardiner maintains that since there were fewer of our general words in use in the sixteenth century, the language was richer in figures of speech.¹⁰ Lowes comments on the Authorized Version of 1611 and its powerful influence upon the English language:

Of its unique significance in the field of English letters there can be no doubt. Its phraseology has become part and parcel of our common tongue--bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh. Its rhythm and cadences, its turns of speech, its familiar imagery, its very words, are woven into the texture of our literature, prose and poetry alike. . . . The King James Version occupies a unique position as a monument of prose.¹¹

Nowhere does a reader witness more evidently this noble monument of prose than in the works of Paul, the

⁸J. H. Gardiner, The Bible as English Literature, p. 358.

⁹J. L. Lowes, "The Noblest Monument of English Prose," in Essays in Appreciation, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰Gardiner, p. 358.

¹¹Lowes, pp. 4-5.

writer of a substantial portion of the New Testament. The entire assortment of Pauline Epistles, almost half of the New Testament, encompasses a unique collection in literature. Although Abbott estimates that the extant letters attributed to Paul amount to less than sixty pages of a moderate-sized octavo, he goes on to remark that the literature bearing upon Paul's writing is so vast and voluminous in scope that a complete author bibliography would be overwhelming.¹² Next to Jesus Christ, Paul, the bond slave and apostle, is the most influential figure in early Christianity. His works furnish his readers with vivid pictures of his activities and aspirations, his triumphs and disasters. Not only do the Epistles provide a distinctive self-portrait, they also give glimpses into the history of the early Church. Lightfoot comments on the works of Paul:

In the whole range of literature there is nothing like Paul's letters. Other correspondence may be more voluminous, more elaborate, more studiously demonstrative. But none is so faithful a mirror of the writer.¹³

Doty also relates the influence of Paul: "In the letters of Paul there speaks . . . a commanding personality . . . indeed, . . . every sentence is the pulse-throb of a human heart."¹⁴ In many ways the Epistles reveal the mind and heart of a remarkable writer.

¹²Lyman Abbott, The Life and Letters of Paul, p. 2.

¹³Malcom Muggeridge and Alec Vidler, Paul: Envoy Extra-ordinaire, p. 16.

¹⁴Doty, p. 187.

One of the most distinctive aspects of his written work is the matter of inspiration. Paul makes clear not only his personal source of inspiration but speaks regarding the "mind" behind the entire Word of God. Baring-Gould defines inspiration as "illumination given to man whereby he discovers what he can by no means perceive (nor) discover on his own. It is revelation, and (it is by this means) that Paul writes the Epistles."¹⁵

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. (II Timothy 3:16)

Paul declares all scripture, without exception, to be "given by inspiration of God." These five words are translated from a single Greek word, theopneustos, which literally means "God-breathed." By means of a powerful figure of speech, the ultimate source, the origin of the entire Word of God, is emphasized. In the King James Version "is" is italicized, indicating that in both instances it was added to the translation from the original text. Elimination of "is" gives the adjective theopneustos more emphasis with active overtones of a verb. This usage adds ever greater impact to the figure of speech anthropathia, whereby human characteristics are ascribed to God.¹⁶

¹⁵S. Baring-Gould, A Study of St. Paul: His Character and Opinions, pp. 320-22.

¹⁶Victor Paul Wierwille, Power for Abundant Living: The Accuracy of the Bible, p. 71.

Not only does Paul indicate that all Scripture is profitable, but he reveals the final purpose or category of profit. The entire Bible is profitable along three lines--"for doctrine, for reproof, for correction." Three times he uses the preposition "for" (eis) to indicate the ultimate purpose. These areas of profit--"doctrine, reproof, and correction"--are thus a means of classifying Scripture. Later this designation will specifically be used to classify the Church Epistles.¹⁷

In addition to illustrating the inspiration and profit of the "God-breathed" Word, Paul also distinguishes between God, the author, and himself as a writer of the Word of God. In the Epistles to the Galatians, Paul clarifies his calling as an apostle: "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)" (Galatians 1:1). Later he indicates how he came to write the Epistles:

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:11,12)

Paul with triple emphasis clarifies any possibility of misunderstanding regarding the source of his knowledge. The three negatives--not, neither, nor (all forms of ou)--form a figure of speech, paradiastole, giving even greater

¹⁷Wierwille, The Church (The Great Mystery Revealed), pp. 7-8.

weight to his words. In commending the Thessalonians, Paul again clearly distinguishes between the word of man and the Word of God:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. (I Thessalonians 2:13)

Paul, as an apostle, a man of God, has been called out and sent forth to deliver a message. He has received the spirit of God, the means whereby he is able to write in his own individual manner (Romans 1:9; I Corinthians 7:40). Paul reiterates how the Scriptures were written in II Peter 1:20: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation."

To be "moved by the Holy Ghost" is to receive revelation. The passage from Peter reinforces Paul's statement that he did not receive the Word of God by the will of man, nor was he taught it. Like every writer of the Scriptures, Paul is "a man in whom the spirit of God is." God inspires Paul to write in his own inimitable style.

Wierwille differentiates between the single author and many writers of the Bible:

Every man in the Bible who wrote the Word of God had spirit from God on him. There is only one author of the Bible and that is God. There are many writers but only one author. God is the author while . . . Paul wrote and many others wrote. God

being Spirit spoke to the spirit upon the holy men and told them what He wanted said. Then the men of God used their vocabularies in speaking what God had revealed.¹⁸

Spiritual inspiration then distinguishes the Bible from other literary works.

The Scriptures, particularly the King James Version, still shine forth as a magnificent rare gem, a pearl of great price, which appreciates in value as the years progress. Of course, any discussion of the Bible's brilliant prose, must focus on the Apostle Paul, one of the holy men who wrote and made an inestimable contribution to the literature of the New Testament. The Pauline epistles, particularly, the Church Epistles warrant further investigation with regard to style. In terms of vocabulary, syntax, structure, as well as other stylistic considerations, an analysis of the form and content of the Church Epistles is certainly justified.

¹⁸Wierwille, Power for Abundant Living, p. 79.

CHAPTER TWO

The Church Epistles: Voice and Style

The Apostle Paul has contributed immeasurably to the canon of the New Testament. The Church Epistles, seven of the works written by Paul, reflect the literary style of this multi-faceted writer. Paul's style is determined, in a large measure, by the voice he adopts. In the first two words of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul introduces himself with a unique calling card--"Paul, a servant . . ." (Romans 1:1). His voice rings throughout the Church Epistles, for it is from the perspective of a servant of Jesus Christ that the writer views himself as well as those to whom he writes.

The word "servant" is translated from the Greek word doulos. It means slave or bondservant and occurs thirty times in the epistles written by Paul. Doulos, while usually translated "servant," has also been rendered "bond" or "bondman." Doulos should be translated "slave" in order to distinguish it from diakonos, another term Paul uses, translated as "servant." A minister or a servant may assume the responsibility of serving God or his fellowman, whereas a slave makes a much deeper commitment. It is from the depth of that commitment that Paul projects his voice as a slave.

In order to see precisely what is entailed in being a slave (doulos), the term must be viewed from an Eastern perspective. The Bible, being a book of the Orient as opposed to the Occident, reflects a way of life totally different from our current lifestyle. A slave in the Church Epistles differs considerably from a slave during the Civil War. In Bible times, slaves were numerous, but their social position was not demeaning. They were considered members of the household of the master, sharing his friendship and love. Slaves were often entrusted with great responsibilities and joined the family in religious practices.¹⁹ The relationship of a doulos and his master is seen in the parables of the Gospels where doulos is invariably used in conjunction with the master or lord of a household.

In Bible times, the master of a slave is exhorted to take care of his slave as himself. The dress and overall appearance of a slave are a direct reflection upon his master. The master is to clothe, feed and take care of his slave in the same manner he takes care of himself. Slave and master are on the same level. According to Jewish tradition, the master of a Hebrew bondman must place his slave on an equal status with himself in meat, drink, lodging, bedding and clothes and must look upon him as "thy

¹⁹Elmer K. Mould, Essentials of Bible History, p. 281.

brother." The essence of the slave-master relationship is seen in this quotation: "Whoever buys a Hebrew servant buys a master for himself."²⁰ Paul emphasizes the positive aspect of this unusual relationship in the first five words of Romans, the first Church Epistle ("Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ"). The more one investigates Paul's particular usage of doulos in light of Biblical culture, the more one understands the significance of his "calling card" or his voice in the epistles. One sees the responsibility afforded a slave in that he is the master's personal representative. He is the spokesman for the master. Slaves do not promote themselves nor their ideas; they simply speak for their masters. Paul makes this point in the Epistle to the Galatians: "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant (doulos) of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). He re-emphasizes this responsibility in II Corinthians 4:5: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants (doulos) for Jesus' sake."

Paul speaks to the Corinthians about a "bond-slave" in a particularly meaningful way. In ancient Greece there were numerous laws dealing with the manumission of slaves whereby a slave could totally commit himself to the service

²⁰The Jewish Encyclopedia, ed. Isidore Singer, p. 403.

of his god, not as a temple servant but actually as a slave to the god. The slave's master would receive the purchase money from the treasury of the temple. The money had been placed there by the slave from his earnings. The slave would then become the property of the god. He would be totally free, emancipated fully from his former master except for occasional loving acts of gratitude or service. The entire ceremony would be witnessed and legally documented. An inscription dated around 199 B.C. from a polygonal wall near Delphi bears out the truth of manumission:

Apollo the Pythian bought from Sosibius of Amphissa, for freedom, a female slave, whose name is Nicaea, by race a Roman, with a price of three minae of silver and a half-mina. Former seller according to the law: Eumnastus of Amphissa. The price he hath received. The purchase, however, Nicaea²¹ hath committed unto Apollo, for freedom.²¹

Paul alludes to this practice in Corinthians. With the plethora of pagan temples and countless deities in the thriving commercial center of Corinth, Paul's allusion would certainly bring vivid mental images to the Corinthians who read and heard his words:

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (I Corinthians 6:20)

For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant (doulos), is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant (doulos).

²¹Adolph Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan, p. 323.

Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants (doulos) of men. (I Corinthians 7:22-23)

In the Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul also mentions the word "slave" paradoxically. To be a slave of Jesus Christ is to be free: "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant (doulos) unto all, that I might gain the more" (I Corinthians 9:19). Slavery and freedom are directly related in the Bible. In the Old Testament a master could keep a Hebrew slave only six years. He was released in the seventh year, called the sabbatical. Every seven sabbaths of years (seven times seven or forty-nine years) was a time of great celebration, the year of the Jubilee. In the fiftieth year, all debtors were freed from debt and all slaves were set free.

A slave, upon being freed, could return to his former master and by his freedom of will choose to serve that master. His motivation for this decision would be his love for the master. The master would then pierce the servant's ear as a symbol of obedience and servitude and the slave would be totally dependent upon his master for food, clothing, shelter and every material need. Paul was familiar with this passage from Exodus:

Now these are the judgements which thou shalt set before them.

If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.

If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him.

If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself.

And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free:

Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever. (Exodus 21:1-6)

The slave who, upon being freed, returned to serve his master was a marked man. His pierced ear indicated to everyone that he belonged to the master. In the same way that the manumitted Greek slave sold himself to the service of his god, Paul as a slave of Jesus Christ "sold out," totally committed his life to his lord and master. Like the slave with the pierced ear, the apostle Paul was a marked man. When a person "sells out" to the master, he becomes a branded slave. The voice of the bond slave, never echoes with more clarity and force than when he talks about himself as branded. Paul speaks of himself as having the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ in his body: "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6:17). The marks refer to a brand placed on a bond slave, indicating that he is owned by the master whose marks he bears. The utmost depth of commitment becomes evident when Paul calls himself a doulos of Jesus Christ.

Paul not only uses the term doulos to present himself, but he also speaks of others as "slaves." He opens the epistle to the Philippians in a manner similar to his introduction in Romans; only here he also names Timothy as slave.

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. (Philippians 1:1)

Paul also designates certain men as fellowservants or sundouloi, those who worked faithfully with him, having an intense commitment. The Greek word sundoulos, literally means fellowslave, one who is a slave with other slaves. The prefix sun implies a close, intimate, personal relationship. In Colossians, Paul refers to Epaphras and Tychicus as fellowslaves: "As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ" (Colossians 1:7) and "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord" (Colossians 4:7). Paul also speaks of each man as a "faithful minister." Being a fellowslave and a faithful minister are interrelated. As fellowslaves, they work with people, pouring out their hearts and lives in service to God. Paul further talks about Epaphras as a doulos in Colossians:

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. (Colossians 4:12)

Of the many committed men whose lives are presented in the Bible, there is no more striking illustration of a doulos than Jesus Christ, the supreme example of a slave. Jesus Christ stands out as a doulos because of his unwavering obedience to God. This aspect of his life Paul touches upon in Philippians 2:7,8:

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:
And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Whether he is introducing or speaking of himself, describing Timothy or others who have a similar commitment to God, or highlighting an aspect of Jesus Christ's life, Paul uses the word doulos in a distinctive way. When Paul introduces himself as a "servant of Jesus Christ," it is by no means a negative epithet. On the contrary, the Apostle uses the word doulos in a remarkably positive way to describe himself and others. Paul uses the voice of the slave of Jesus Christ to convey his message throughout the Church Epistles. In fact, Paul's voice is one of the most distinctive characteristics of his style.

Style, as a literary term, has been discussed and defined in countless ways. The divergencies of opinions indicate that it is an elusive quality writers continually endeavor to pin down. J. V. Cunningham responds to the question of what is style with another question:

Is it (style) platonic and seldom seen throughout a whole work as Cicero maintains . . . or is it like the sublime of Longinus, that striking distinction that bowls one over . . . or (a) neutral concept in everything?²²

Other writers attempt to answer the question as to what is style in a wide variety of ways. F. T. Cooper, seeing style as an unconscious quality, maintains that "it is the aroma of literature, comparable to the bouquet of old wine. You cannot age a new vintage overnight by any artificial process. No writer, by taking thought, can add a cubit to his height as a stylist."²³ Certainly this aspect of style would apply to Paul. The Church Epistles reveal that he is not consciously trying to affect a certain posture as a writer. As letters, they reveal a natural quality, indicating that Paul is not self-consciously stylistic.

James Russell Lowell's definition also applies to Paul's style: "the establishment of a perfect mutual understanding between the worker and his material."²⁴ As a workman, a term Paul uses himself, of the Word of God, Paul is adept at conveying his message from God. Walter Pater restates Lowell's definition when he maintains that "style is in the right way when it . . . tends to give the phrase, the sentence, the structural member, the entire

²²J. V. Cunningham, ed., The Problem of Style, p. 9.

²³Frederick T. Cooper, The Craftsmanship of Style, p. 210.

²⁴F. T. Cooper, p. 211.

composition song or essay, a similar unity with its subject and with itself."²⁵

Of the innumerable individuals who have attempted to distill the essence of style into a concise definition, perhaps Comte de Buffon has given the most succinct. Buffon asserts "Le style c'est l'homme meme," "style is the man himself."²⁶ If we are to see the man's style, we must look at his works which boldly declare his particular way of conveying his ideas. Paul's works in letter format, bear the characteristic stamp of an individual better than any other document.²⁷ Buck and Greer indicate the value of Paul's writings as an insight into the man:

In no other literary form could we, to the same extent, in writing see the man. Letters are the most personal form of literature. A man may write a treatise or a history or even a poem and hide his personality behind it; but letters are valueless unless the writer shows himself. Paul is constantly visible. . . . You can feel his heart throbbing in every chapter he ever wrote. He has painted his own portrait--not only that of the outward man, but of his innermost feelings--as no one else could have painted it.²⁸

²⁵F. T. Cooper, p. 211.

²⁶Mary G. McEdwards, Introduction to Style, p. 3.

²⁷Gunther Bornkamm, Paul, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, p. xxiii.

²⁸Charles Buck and Greer Taylor, Saint Paul: A Study of the Development of His Thought, p. 95.

Nowhere is the style of the man himself more clearly revealed than through his vocabulary. Paul's word choice is distinctive, revealing a man of rare intellect who never loses the common touch. Deissmann describes the Apostle's word choice in this manner:

It remains unliterary . . . it is thickly studded with rugged forceful words taken from the popular idiom, it is perhaps the most brilliant example of the artless though not unartistic colloquial prose of a travelled city-resident of the Roman Empire.²⁹

Paul uses words in a powerful manner; indeed "For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful" (II Corinthians 10:10). He seems to thunder. As Erasmus says, "Paul thunders and lightens and speaks sheer flame."³⁰ Muggeridge and Vidler cite Donne who echoes similar views: "Whenever I open St. Paul's epistles, I meet not words but thunder and universal thunder, thunder that passes through all the world."³¹ While Paul's vocabulary is certainly powerful, it is at the same time diversely rich, not only evoking thunder but suggesting the welcomed gentleness of a summer shower as in the compassionate writing to the Thessalonians:

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:
So being affectionately desirous of you,
we were willing to have imparted unto you,
not the gospel of God only, but also our
own souls, because ye were dear unto us.
(I Thessalonians 2:7)

²⁹Deissmann, Light, p. 78.

³⁰T. R. Glover, Paul of Tarsus, p. 194.

³¹Muggeridge and Vidler, p. 13.

Paul uses the image of a nurse with her children. Literally the Apostle refers to a nursing mother who draws her child to her breast. The word "her" should be translated "her own," indicating that a mother is meant. "Cherisheth" is also a term of endearment, meaning "to warm, to make warm by incubation," as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wing. Another motherly term used is "affectionately desirous" (himeiromai or homeiromai) which means "to long for, yearn after, desire."³² Paul's word choice is then an important facet of his style.

Moreover, Paul's style reflects incredible versatility, ranging from references to athletics to the human body to military and legal terms.

One specific area in which Paul demonstrates a rich vocabulary and fascinating familiarity is athletics. He draws spiritual parallels between athletic contests and the Christian believer's daily endeavors. We find a classic illustration in the Epistle to the Corinthians:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.
 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.
 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

³²Wierwille, "I and II Thessalonians," New Knoxville, Ohio, n.d.

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. (I Corinthians 9:24-27)

Here Paul alludes to athletics. "Race" is translated from the Greek word stadion, seen in our word "stadium." Elsewhere it is translated "furlong," approximately 220 yards or the length of that particular course.³³ "Run" is the word trecho, again an athletic term used in Romans 9:16, Galatians 2:2; 5:7, and Philippians 2:16. A contestant runs the race in order to obtain the prize which Paul describes as a "corruptible crown." In such a race, the winner goes to the victor's stand and receives a crown of laurel leaves, wild olive branches, parsley, pine cones or some other indigenous leaves.³⁴ The awards ceremony corresponds to the awarding of medals at our contemporary Olympic Games.

Paul then discusses the athlete who "strives for the mastery" and "is temperate in all things." To "strive for the mastery" is literally to "contend in the games." It is translated from agonizomai, also used in Colossians 1:29 and 4:12. It is the verb from which the English word "agonize" is transliterated. The accompanying phrase, "is

³³E. W. Bullinger, The Companion Bible, p. 1711.

³⁴This crown was probably made from pine leaves since pine groves surrounded the Isthmian stadium. The same trees are said to still grow plentifully on the Isthmus of Corinth where athletic events were held.

temperate in all things," involves "exercising self-control in all disciplined training." The word is also used in I Corinthians 7:9 where it is rendered "contain," as in containing one's self emotionally.

Paul also alludes to another form of athletic competition in this passage when he says "so fight I." Here he refers to boxing and goes on to say, "not as one that beateth the air" (shadowboxes). The passage culminates with the reason for the previous exhortation to self-discipline and control: "that in no way having heralded the summons of the competitors, I myself having been proven to be rejected from the competition."³⁵ The passage reflects how Paul draws upon his knowledge of athletics to relate the walk of a believer in practical terms.

Paul's extensive use of athletic references in the Epistle to the Corinthians is particularly noteworthy. Corinth is located on a narrow isthmus of Greece. The Isthmus of Corinth was the location of the great national athletic festival, the Isthmian Games which were held every two years attracting spectators from throughout the Mediterranean world. Conybeare and Howson maintain that the Apostle Paul very likely attended one of the renown festivals since

³⁵Wierwille, "Athletes of the Spirit," The Way International, New Knoxville, Ohio, n.d.

he spent two years at Corinth.³⁶ Certainly the games were a source of pride for the Corinthians who would readily relate to Paul's athletic allusions.

Not only does Paul use athletic terminology, he frequently combines athletic and military analogies. Once again the writer of the Church Epistles draws a parallel between a soldier and a Christian believer. Paul uses words such as "weapons," (II Corinthians 6:7; 10:4 and Romans 13:12), "armour" (Ephesians 6:11,13) and fellowsoldier (Philippians 2:25). Military terms abound in Ephesians 6:11-17:

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.
 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.
 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;
 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.
 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

The terms "armour," "shield," "sword" and "helmet" immediately bring warfare to mind. Also implicit in this

³⁶Conybeare and Howson, p. 540.

passage which discusses the armament of a believer is the idea of athletics. The spiritual struggle against principalities and powers is presented as a wrestling match (palē), used only in this instance in Ephesians. In verses 11-14 the word "stand" is used three times in addition to the word "withstand" found in verse 13. Involved in the word is the idea of "standing," as at the end of an athletic event when the winner goes to the "victor's stand." Here Paul blends the military and the athletic to reinforce the principle of preparation and discipline as an "athlete of the spirit." He makes the same kind of double emphasis in II Timothy 2:3-5:

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

Here Paul uses military terminology in verses 3-4: "soldier" (stratiotes) is used twice, and "warreth" (strateuomen) literally means "serving as a soldier." In verse 5 he refers to an athlete: "strive for masteries" and "strive lawfully" are both forms of the verb athleo. "Yet is he not crowned" refers to the crown of laurel, olive or other leaves awarded at the end of an athletic event. Paul's fluent blending of military and athletic terms to relate specific aspects of the Christian believer's life shows

his versatility and varied experience.

In addition to these areas, Paul's vocabulary also reveals his distinctive calling as an apostle. One of the words frequently used in the Church Epistles is "mystery," transliterated from musterion. Of the twenty-eight times the word is used in the New Testament, it occurs twenty-one times in the Pauline Epistles. Paul often uses the term in conjunction with "the great mystery," a definite time period known as an administration (oikonomia).³⁷ Knowledge of the mystery was made known to Paul as he declares in Romans and Ephesians:

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began. (Romans 16:25)

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things. . . . (Ephesians 3:3,4,9)

Because of Paul's position as the apostle to whom the administration of "the great mystery" was revealed, metaphors such as "administration" and "mystery" are uniquely used in Paul's writings.

Whether he is referring to an "athlete," a "soldier" or a "slave," Paul's word choice is always striking in its varied precision. Overall his writing reflects a "common

vocabulary," which McEdwards defines as a blending of the literary and the colloquial.³⁸ Nock thinks of Paul's Greek as not literary but not at all like the careless Greek of popular letters which survive on papyrus.³⁹ Weinel describes Paul's language as "alive, going straight to the heart, and of an originality and force that had long been missing from the literature of the time."⁴⁰

Aside from a study of Paul's vocabulary, there are other stylistic considerations of the Church Epistles. Paul's style is often described as oratorical in that his writings were intended to give instruction and to be read aloud.⁴¹ Certainly his voice as a writer would be evident throughout the works. Nock maintains that he demonstrates a sense of rhythm and effective parallelism as well as other stylistic devices which lend themselves to oral rendering of a written work.⁴² Rigaux cites Paul's oratorical style through the use of certain rhetorical devices such as meiosis (I Thessalonians 2:15); anacolutha (II Thessalonians 2:2); recitative formulas (I Thessalonians 1:9-10);

³⁸McEdwards, p. 38.

³⁹Arthur Darby Nock, St. Paul, p. 235.

⁴⁰Heinrich S. Weinel, Paul: The Man and His Work, p. 31.

⁴¹Turner, p. 83.

⁴²Nock, p. 234.

and cumulative formulas (I Thessalonians 2:14-15).⁴³

Paul's oratorical style is most clearly seen in his dialectics, oral discussions with proof.⁴⁴ Several writers have seen similarities between the diatribe and literary form used by contemporary Greek Roman writers and Paul's writings. A diatribe is a dialogue transformed into a monologue in order to refute an imaginary opponent. Elements of the diatribe include short simple sentences, ironical imperatives, parataxis, asyndeton and rhetorical questions. Examples of such similarities of style can be found throughout the Church Epistles.⁴⁵ Concerning the stylistic influence of the diatribe in Paul's writings, Turner quotes Malherbe: "Regardless of the avenue by which Paul was introduced to this mode of expression, he appropriated it in no artificial way. It became part of his own style."⁴⁶

The Church Epistles are filled with other stylistic devices which help make them literary masterpieces. These particular writings by Paul are especially rich in figures of speech. There are 212 figures used in the scriptures.⁴⁷

⁴³Béda Rigaux, The Letters of St. Paul--Modern Studies, Stephan Yonick, ed. and trans., pp. 128-29.

⁴⁴Deissmann, Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History, William E. Wilson, trans., p. 104.

⁴⁵Turner, p. 81.

⁴⁶Turner, p. 82.

⁴⁷Wierwille, Power for Abundant Living, p. 71.

Of these an overwhelming number are found in the Church Epistles alone. Paul makes use of a variety of figures from allegory (Galatians 4:22,24) to zeugma (I Timothy 4:3).

Closely related to figures of speech is the imagery Paul employs. Paul's imagery is rich and varied, adding greatly to the texture of the works. One of the images Paul sustains throughout the seven Church Epistles is that of "the one body." The word translated body is soma, used 145 times in the New Testament with the majority of its usage in the Epistles. In fact, the term is used more than fifty times in Corinthians alone. There are references in Ephesians to the church as "the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12) in addition to Paul's declaration of "one body" in Ephesians 4:4. One of the most striking instances of the image is in Corinthians:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body?

But now are they many members, yet but one body.

And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked:

That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (I Corinthians 12:12-27)

Paul uses a very obvious example to relate the unity of the Church. In the same way that the human body functions by means of the working of its component "members," the "members" of the Body of Christ are also interrelated. This section is set in correspondence with the first eleven verses which centers around the manifestations of the spirit (verses seven and eleven). Paul is showing in verses 12-27 that the Church is one body and each individual member within that body is complete. He is also illustrating that each member is an integral part of the entire body. Paul makes his point by using the familiar imagery of the human body.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Wierwille, Receiving the Holy Spirit Today, pp. 185-87.

In addition to imagery, syntax can be a kind of fingerprint that identifies a writer's style. How Paul puts together his sentences can be especially revealing. Paul's arrangement of sentences as reflected in the Greek from which the New Testament is translated reveals a complex syntax which he has adapted to his own particular use. An example of Paul's characteristic syntax is his use of an infinitive in place of an imperative, as in Romans 12:15 and Philippians 3:16. This syntactical variation is seen from the Greek text rather than in the translation of the King James Version:

Rejoice (charein--to rejoice) with them
that do rejoice, and weep with them that
weep. (Romans 12:15)

Nevertheless, whereto we have already
attained, let us walk (stoichein--to walk)
by the same rule, let us mind the same
thing. (Philippians 3:16)

This usage may be derived from Hebrew grammar, revealing a Semitic influence upon Paul's Biblical Greek. He also occasionally appends a personal pronoun to a noun in the genitive case as in Romans 7:24: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The phrase "the body of this death" refers to "this body of death" or "this dead body." Another Semitic syntactical pattern involves Paul's use of the singular noun to depict that which is shared by a group of people as in "heart" (Romans 1:21; II Corinthians 3:5; and Ephesians 5:19). Indeed Paul's syntax reflects a profound Semitic

influence.⁴⁹

A brief examination of Paul's Hebraic background will enhance an understanding of the Semitic influence upon his style. Ladd sees the significance of the Semitic influence in the Bible when he states,

The language of the New Testament cannot be totally understood or explained in terms of Hellenistic Greek . . . it also embodies a large Semitic element, both from vernacular Aramaic which Jesus used, and from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint).⁵⁰

Paul's Semitic background is an inescapable reality, for his academic training was as a Pharisee. Although he was born in Tarsus, he was "brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel," the foremost Hebrew scholar of his time. Pharisees, particularly those of Jerusalem, the intellectual and religious center of Judaism, were purists in the most literal sense. As a "Hebrew of Hebrews" and strict adherent of "the most straitest sect of our religion," Paul undoubtedly spoke Aramaic and had nothing but contempt for the Greek language. The following anecdote shows the Hebrew disdain for Greek:

A young rabbi asked his uncle, a learned teacher of the Law, for permission to study Greek since the nephew knew the whole Torah. The uncle referred him to the Book of Joshua which commands 'thou

⁴⁹Turner, pp. 83-93.

⁵⁰George Eldon Ladd, The New Testament and Criticism, p. 93.

shalt meditate therein day and night.'
The elder rabbi replied, 'Find the hour
that is not of the day nor the night,
and therein you may study Grecian wis-
dom.'⁵¹

It is said that Gamaliel so despised an Aramaic paraphrase (targum) of the Book of Job that he buried it in the depths of the earth.⁵² With such contempt for an Aramaic paraphrase, how much more hatred would a "Pharisee of the Pharisees" have for Greek? Orthodox practitioners of Judaism instructed their sons to read and speak Hebrew, the language in which the blessings of the priest are spoken and in which the sacred Scriptures are written. Many believe that "it is better to feed your children swine flesh than to teach them Greek."⁵³

It is understandable that several scholars, such as Norden, see Paul's writings as wholly "unhellenic."⁵⁴ Abbott describes the Apostle in this manner:

Paul is not a logician. . . . He was not a student of philosophy. His writings indicated nothing that shows familiarity with Greek philosophy; there is nothing to indicate that he even heard of Plato or Socrates.⁵⁵

⁵¹Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ, p. 126.

⁵²Walter J. Cummins, "The Life and Times of Jesus," The Way International, New Knoxville, Ohio, 23 Sept. 1975.

⁵³Edersheim, pp. 124.

⁵⁴Turner, p. 86.

⁵⁵Abbott, pp. 10-11.

While Paul certainly had the intellectual capacity to write and speak Greek, his exposure to the language must have occurred following his conversion. Rigaux makes this point in depicting Paul as a "Semitic orator who thought in Aramaic; a Jew whose second language was Greek."⁵⁶ Paul shows a rabbinic rather than a classical, academic logic. Baring-Gould insists that we see Paul not beside Aristotle and Plato, but beside Hillel and Gamaliel.⁵⁷

In Acts, Paul's speech at Mars' Hill (Acts 17:18ff) indicates a familiarity with certain Stoic poets and their mental perspective by alluding to a line from "Phaenomena" by Aratus, a native Cilician of the third century B.C.: "We also are his offspring" (Acts 17:29). Cleantes, another poet of the same period, wrote a similar line in his "Hymn to Zeus: "Unto thee may all flesh speak: for we are thy offspring."⁵⁸ Paul's exposure to Stoicism undoubtedly occurred after his conversion when he returned to Tarsus, an intellectual and cultural center of noted Stoics. His writings, however, are virtually void of quotations from Greek literature. The single line from Menander's "Thais" is given as a formal quotation in I Corinthians 15:32, but the phrase could have become a common saying. Very likely

⁵⁶Rigaux, p. 129.

⁵⁷Baring-Gould, p. 336.

⁵⁸Merrill F. Unger, Archaeology and the New Testament, p. 235.

Paul could be referring to a similar passage from the Prophets (Isaiah 22:13).

Paul's training in the Pharisaic tradition of the oral law never fails to reveal his continual reference to the Old Testament, which is characteristic of his style. In that Paul refers to the Old Testament more than fifty times in the Epistles,⁵⁹ Nock maintains that "there is not a paragraph in Paul's writing which does not include some subconscious recollection of the Old Testament."⁶⁰ Often the Apostle will introduce an Old Testament reference with the rhetorical question, "what saith the Scripture?" (Romans 4:3; Galatians 4:30). At other times he makes the declaration, "For the Scripture saith" (Romans 9:17; 10:11). Occasionally Paul speaks of the "law and the prophets" (Romans 3:21) or "the prophets in the holy Scriptures" (Romans 1:2) and he makes specific mention of Moses (Romans 10:19), Hosea (Romans 9:25), Isaiah (Romans 10:16,20), Elijah (Romans 11:2) and David (Romans 4:6; 11:9). The foundation of all Jewish education was built upon the Law of God. Mythology, theology, and other religions or philosophies played no part in Jewish education. The sole purpose of education was to prepare for and impart the knowledge of God. All aspects of Hebrew culture centered

⁵⁹Rigaux, p. 124.

⁶⁰Nock, p. 236.

upon knowledge of God and service.⁶¹

The style of the Apostle Paul exemplifies both of these qualities. The opening appositive of Romans 1:1-- "Paul, a servant"--is the first brush stroke of a striking self-portrait of service against a background of the knowledge of God. The portrait comes to life as the voice of the bond slave indicates Paul's position as writer. The influence of the voice is seen in every facet of his style. Paul's writing becomes a rich tapestry, reflecting the masterful mind of the writer whose inspiration is God. The synthesis of all its elements reflects McEdwards' quintessential definition:

(Style is) the product . . . conscious and unconscious selection of the topic, the organization, the diction, the vocabulary, the syntax, and the imagery allowed (by the writer's) premises to communicate his emotions and ideas in written or spoken form.⁶²

⁶¹Edersheim, pp. 124-25.

⁶²McEdwards, p. 14.

CHAPTER THREE

The Church Epistles: Genre and Structure

Paul's literary contributions to the New Testament have been classified in various ways--as essays, letters, epistles, and treatises. Designation of these literary works as essays is a rather broad classification, while classification as letters or epistles presents more restricted definitions.

One of the less obvious ways in which the works of Paul may be viewed is as essays. Stewart defines an essay as "any short, unified work of non-fiction prose having some degree of complexity and dealing with a single subject."⁶³ This broad definition embraces the writings of Paul. As a literary form Paul's essays would pre-date Montaigne's use of the term essai in the 1550s to designate his particular literary expositions.⁶⁴ If the works by Paul are seen as essays, they must be examined nonetheless in terms of the manner in which they are clothed, as letters or epistles.

⁶³John L. Stewart, The Essay: A Critical Anthology, p. xiii.

⁶⁴Suzanne Silberstein and Marian Seldin, Sense and Style--The Craft of the Essay, p. xi.

Deissmann has completed a comprehensive and controversial study of Biblical forms of Paul's writings and points to some striking distinctions between letters and epistles. The controversy surrounding the difference between the terms centers around Deissmann's allegation that dogmatic interpretations and theological views generate rigid qualifications which hinder the study of Paul's works. The German scholar develops his own designations in response to three factors: 1) the dogmatism of theology; 2) the classical scholarship which insists upon placing the Epistles beside standard classical Greek literature; 3) the misapplication of the term "inspiration." Ultimately Deissmann comes up with his own definition and distinction between letter and epistle. His conclusions are based on investigations of the New Testament as a pre-literary class by itself.⁶⁵

In defining a letter, Deissmann enumerates two features which distinguish it from an epistle. A letter is first of all "private (confidential, not public, secret, individual and personal)."⁶⁶ He also suggests that it is "related to or a substitute for direct oral conversation (a conversation in writing; a conversation halved; a substitute for spoken words)."⁶⁷ Moreover, he considers the

⁶⁵Doty, pp. 185-88.

⁶⁶Doty, p. 190.

⁶⁷Doty, p. 190.

letter as non-literary (artless and unpremeditated).⁶⁸

The epistle on the other hand is public, designed not merely for the present public but for the future, such as a drama, oration or dialogue. A second distinction is that an epistle is a consciously designed form of art. Finally an epistle is a "literary letter," the opposite of a real letter. Deissmann equates literary with artistic since the non-literary qualities of Paul's works guarantee their reliability. In developing this elaborate distinction, Deissmann classifies Paul's writings as letters rather than epistles.⁶⁹

While endeavoring to avoid the rigid limitations and preconceptions of dogmatism, theology, and classicism, Deissmann imposes a rather strict designation on the terms letter and epistle. Doty comments that Deissmann's definitions were "formed due to sensitivities other than merely the devising of a critical tool."⁷⁰ Despite the admirable intentions of Deissmann, many scholars voice arguments against his definitions. Some feel that his distinction is overly "strained." In establishing too literary a definition of the epistles, others feel he goes too far in denying the literary worth of the Pauline works. Still

⁶⁸Doty, p. 190.

⁶⁹Doty, p. 186.

⁷⁰Doty, p. 189.

others feel he overemphasizes the unliterary aspects of the Apostle's works.⁷¹

In response to Deissmann's work, Doty offers what he considers a more inclusive definition of a letter. He designates a letter as a literary product in letter form intended for private or public readers. This form is composed of greetings, conclusions or other formally stylized components, generally with reference to a clear intent to be a letter. The format suggests a recognition on the writer's part that the writing involves someone wishing to communicate in writing to someone else removed from him. Doty's literary product is intended to be collected or published because it is considered to have historical, personal, cultural, or literary-historical value. It is incorporated within a literary work or is considered one itself regardless of the intent of the original author. Moreover, the literary product is intended to be literature either for the present or for the future.⁷²

Doty modifies Deissmann's rigid distinction of a letter by offering a classification of multiple possibilities. He develops a classification based on a spectrum of New Testament letters ranging from private to public. With this classification he only takes into account formal

⁷¹Doty, p. 189.

⁷²Doty, pp. 193-94.

conventions and content. Doty distinguishes between degrees of privacy in letters (more and less private). Under private letters he includes correspondence from a writer to a single individual or to a distinct group or to certain addressees. Paul's writings then fall toward the "more private" end of the spectrum.

Under Doty's classification less private is equated with less intimate, particularly letters which are entirely formal according to the accepted Hellenistic conventions of letter writing. The construction of such letters is totally contrived. Less private letters include official, public, discursive and other special categories. Doty's "Classification of Epistolary Literature" offers a thorough discussion of this modification of Deissmann's definition.⁷³

Aside from Deissmann's effort to offer a definitive designation of Paul's writings and Doty's response to it, others have discussed the nature of Paul's works. For example, Moffatt discusses the epistolary literature of early Christianity in terms of the three-fold division made by Cicero: epistles or letters giving instruction or information; playful and familiar notes to friends; and letters of consolation.⁷⁴ The epistolary form was used by

⁷³Doty, pp. 193-95.

⁷⁴James Moffatt, An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament, p. 60.

the Greeks and Romans to give semi-literary dress to dissertations upon criticism, jurisprudence, and even science. Rigaux designates as epistles literary products which use the form of a letter.⁷⁵ "Paul chose the epistolary forms as the best method to communicate his message," maintains Scott.⁷⁶ According to Turner, Paul's works contain the same kind of oratorical and literary devices found in formal epistles, yet Turner classifies the New Testament works as private letters rather than formal epistles.⁷⁷

Turner and many other scholars, in light of Deissmann's definitions, seem to accept the letter as the most suitable designation of Paul's New Testament communications. Bornkamm, for instance, insists that Paul's writings are genuine letters:

Paul's literary legacy is composed exclusively of letters. . . They are not collections of pious maxims or religious meditations, nor are they products of literary artistry in the garb of letters (a practice for which there are plenty of examples, beginning with the classical world. These letters are real letters, not private letters, but were designed for the large audience of the churches, and intended to be read aloud.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Rigaux, p. 118.

⁷⁶Ernest Scott, Literature of the New Testament, p. 108.

⁷⁷Turner, p. 83.

⁷⁸Bornkamm, p. xi-xii.

Enslin also maintains that Paul's writings are "letters in the truest sense of the word."⁷⁹ He contrasts a letter with an epistle which he designates as "a distinct literary device, a letter only in form, intended for general reading and designed to influence whomsoever chances to read it."⁸⁰ Letters, on the other hand, are purely personal writing with Deissmann's "an 'I' to 'you'" designation.⁸¹

Bahr makes a further distinction between letters and records, both of which are ancient literary forms. He quotes Demetrius' work On Style, written during the second half of the first century A.D., and defines a letter as "any communication in writing between two parties (individuals or groups) who are separated from each other . . . a substitute conversation."⁸² Bahr contrasts letter (cheirographon)--something written by hand--with record (hupomnēma)--a reminder:

(A record is) not essentially an instrument of communication between separated parties but a recounting or report by a third person of the oral agreement reached by two parties. A record has only secondary importance in that it is a fixed form of the original agreement.⁸³

⁷⁹Morton S. Enslin, The Literature of the Christian Movement, Part 3 of Christian Beginnings, p. 213.

⁸⁰Enslin, p. 213.

⁸¹Enslin, p. 213.

⁸²Gordon J. Bahr, "The Subscription in the Pauline Letters," Journal of Biblical Literature, 87 (1968), 27.

⁸³Bahr, p. 27.

There is no sharp distinction between a letter and a record since records sometime appear in letter format.

Although scholars differ considerably in offering distinctive terms of classifying, the writings of Paul are most familiarly regarded as epistles. Epistle appears to be the more formal designation and the term has been accepted as the title given to the New Testament books in the King James Version of the Bible. Whether they are referred to as letters or epistles, in order to more fully comprehend their stylistic significance, the works of Paul must be examined collectively as well as individually, focusing on their form as well as content.

Of the epistles written by Paul, the Church Epistles stand out as seven brilliant gems of literature. The format of this writing is ancient; however, Paul uses his own individual organizational design. Rigaux notes that "the ancient form of letters enables us to find in the Pauline letters the basic structure, the use of conventionalized expressions, as well as some aspects of composition."⁸⁴ Although Paul begins with the prevailing Greek format of letters, he modifies it and comes closer to an Oriental pattern, according to Marxsen.⁸⁵ Mullins recommends that

⁸⁴Rigaux, p. 118.

⁸⁵Willi Marxsen, Introduction to the New Testament: An Approach to Its Problems, trans. G. Buswell, p. 24.

a study of the Epistles should begin with structure rather than content.⁸⁶

Structure provides the framework upon which Paul builds his literary masterpieces. The outline of the Church Epistles includes an opening address (salutation) or greeting, a thanksgiving (eucharisto), the body, and final conclusion (subscription). The development of the opening, the body, and the conclusion reflect the workmanship of an inspired masterbuilder who leaves his unmistakable signature on each work of art. Whether he is extending greetings and remembering his love for the Thessalonians or reproving the Corinthians for their lack of knowledge in spiritual matters or closing with an intense longing to see the face of the Colossians, Paul adds his original touch to the basic format of a popular means of communication.

In discussing the opening of the epistles in the New Testament, Wilder comments that while the basic form Paul uses is not wholly novel, his approach is radically different in the form of the address and opening.⁸⁷ Marxsen points out the difference between Paul's greetings and the traditional one-sentence Greek opening with an elliptical use of the word "grace" (chairen). Paul, in contrast,

⁸⁶Terence Y. Mullins, "Disclosure. A Literary Form in the New Testament," Novum Testamentum, 7 (1964), 50.

⁸⁷Wilder, p. 34.

replaces "grace" with a full greeting, beginning with "grace be to you." He comes closer to the Eastern greeting which has two sentences, as in Ephesians 1:2: "Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." The Greek opening could be modified in a similar manner, but there are no parallels to Paul's introductions in ancient literature.⁸⁸ Paul makes further modifications by offering a more precise description of himself as well as the recipient, as in the opening to Philippians:

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:
 Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
 (Philippians 1:1,2)

The greeting, a phrase in ancient Greek letters, is contrasted with the epistolary form (wish form) used in the first century. This distinct literary form is intended to establish an emotional rather than an intellectual bond of friendship. Mullins speaks of it as "the equivalent to a wave of a hand."⁸⁹

The epistolary section can be found in places other than at the beginning of a letter and occurs in one of three forms:

⁸⁸Marxsen, pp. 24-25.

⁸⁹Mullins, "Greeting As a New Testament Form," Journal of Biblical Literature, 87 (1968), 418.

- 1) The first person--a writer greets someone directly and personally. This form usually occurs with a greeting immediately after the opening.
- 2) The second person--a writer tells the addressee to greet someone for him; it is an indirect salutation.
- 3) The third person--a writer relays to the addressee the information that a third party greet someone. It is the least personal.⁹⁰

All three types of greetings are used in the Church Epistles. The first person greeting is most noticeably evident in Romans 16:22: "I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord." Colossians 4:15 provides an example of the second person greeting: "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house." Philippians 4:22 is an example of a third person greeting: "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household."

Further examination of the greeting in the Church Epistles reveals four essential elements: a greeting verb (some form of aspazesthai), an indication of the greeter, the person being greeted, and an optional elaborating phrase. Elaborating phrases indicate specifics of the writer-reader relationship. Romans 16 abounds with second person greetings with numerous modifying phrases, indicating an intimate relationship between Paul and those addressed.⁹¹

⁹⁰Mullins, "Greeting," p. 418.

⁹¹Mullins, "Greeting," pp. 419-22.

Note Paul's elaboration in Romans 16:6-12:

Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us. Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord. Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.

Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household. Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.

Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.

From the opening lines until the close of each Church epistle, Paul adapts the epistolary format to fit his specific needs. An examination of his greetings reveals characteristic elements which distinguish Paul's writings from the traditional format used during the first century. His extensive elaboration at the end of Romans demonstrates the warm personal touch he incorporates into his greetings. Some of the most extensive epistolary analyses have been done of the greeting. Other studies of the opening have focused on the thanksgiving which follows the greeting and precedes the introduction to the body. Schubert has been among the noted scholars to analyze the thanksgiving section in depth. Sanders extends Schubert's work, using a formula to pinpoint the introduction to the body. He combines the request formula plus the disclosure formula into a single form.⁹² By comparing Paul's epistles

⁹²Mullins, "Disclosure," pp. 44-45.

with private Greek letters, White has developed six formulae which he uses to find the introduction to the body in five of the Church Epistles.⁹³

According to White, the epistles most frequently show the "disclosure formula." This indicates the transition from the opening to the introduction of the body. The disclosure is a formula or phrase conveying either the sender's desire or a command that the reader "know" something. Elements of this form include a verb in the imperative. The verb of disclosure is often a two-member unit: a verb of desire (thelo/lomai) in the first person indicative and a verb of knowing (ginosko) in the infinitive. Also included is a vocative of address (Brethren--adelphoi) followed by the subjective to be disclosed, introduced by (hoti--that). Examples can be seen in Galatians 1:11 and Romans 1:13:

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

Other examples include I Thessalonians 2:1; Philippians 1:12; and II Corinthians 1:8.⁹⁴

⁹³John L. White, "Introductory Formulae in the Body of the Pauline Letter," Journal of Biblical Literature, 90 (1971), 92.

⁹⁴White, p. 93.

A second formula is the "request formula," which corresponds to a petition. Background information precedes the request, outlining the circumstances surrounding the request, but this information does not always precede the body in private letters. The introduction of request occurs with the conjunction (dio--here). There is also a verb of request (parakaleo) in the vocative form. The contents of the request are introduced by (peri, hina and the aorist infinitive) but most often by a clause of purpose (hina).⁹⁵ A notable example is I Corinthians 1:10:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

A third type of formula is an "expression of joy." Involved in this formula is either the verb "I rejoice" (chairo) in the aorist tense or the noun joy (charis) as the direct object. Also involved is an adverb denoting magnitude and a statement regarding the arrival of a letter or concerning something heard. What has been heard is introduced by hoti (that) and is in the vocative form.⁹⁶ An illustration is found in Philippians 4:10:

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

⁹⁵White, p. 93.

⁹⁶White, p. 95.

Still another type of introductory formula is the "expression of astonishment." In private Greek letters the sender reproaches the recipient for failure to write, citing the number of letters written and the failure to respond. Such an introduction often begins with "I marvel" (thaumazo) accompanied by the vocative or some exclamatory form of address.⁹⁷ A striking example is seen in Galatians 1:6: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel."

"The statement of compliance" is often used in reference to previous instruction. The sender reminds the recipient of the instruction previously given but not heeded. The sender may also inform the addressee that he has complied with the instruction given. Elements include an introductory adverb as well as a verb of instruction, generally "I command" (entello) in the past tense. The object of instruction is often introduced by peri (about, concerning). Finally there is a statement concerning either the fulfillment of the instruction or an assertion regarding the sender's confidence in the addressee.⁹⁸ Galatians 1:9 provides such a formula: "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

⁹⁷White, p. 86.

⁹⁸White, p. 96.

The last formula elaborated upon by White involves the use of a verb of hearing or learning. In this report the writer expresses grief or anxiety in the first person ("I grieve," "I agonize"). An adverb denotes the degree of grief and the subject is stated. Galatians 1:13ff illustrates this formula although it is not stated in the first person nor characterized by grief or anxiety.⁹⁹

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it.

White has identified these formulae in an attempt to analyze some of the Church Epistles. By closely examining the introductory part of the body, noting where the formula begins and ends, White then endeavors to pinpoint the introductory section. From White's study it is evident that Paul once again uses traditional formats seen in Greek letters, but he modifies them to fit his specific purposes. The introduction imparts new information or recalls previous information of mutual interest leading up to the body.¹⁰⁰ From introduction to conclusion, each section of the Church Epistles is highly structured.

Another part of the introductory section of the Epistles is the thanksgiving (eucharisto). In discussing Schubert's article on this section, Sanders indicates that

⁹⁹White, p. 97.

¹⁰⁰White, p. 97.

the thanksgiving may be more structured than has been realized.¹⁰¹ An example of the transition between the thanksgiving and the next section is seen at the thanksgiving in I Corinthians 1:4-10:

I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;

That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge;

Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:

So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

The climax of the thanksgiving occurs in verses eight and nine. A distinctive new clause appears in verse ten. Aspects of the clause correspond to White's designation of the "request formula." Similar examples are seen in Philippians 1:12ff and II Thessalonians 2:1ff. This form is not confined to the opening of the epistles, however. It is also used to introduce new material, to change

¹⁰¹Jack T. Sanders, "The Transition from Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving to Body in the Letters of the Pauline Corpus," Journal of Biblical Literature, 81 (1962), 348.

the subject, or to provide a new prospective on a discussion. The form also provides a heading and brief statement of content, similar to a headline and subtitle as in Romans 7:1: "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?" Sanders also cites numerous examples of the highly structured nature of the thanksgiving as part of the introductory section which precedes the body of the Church Epistles.¹⁰² Every facet of the epistolary section is structured and fits with the accompanying segment to form a harmonious literary whole.

From the opening salutation, Paul moves progressively through the thanksgiving (eucharisto) into the close of the greeting and blessing before entering the body of the epistle. From the body pulsates the heart of the message. Paul may distinguish "sin" from "sins" as in Romans or he may set the procedure for carrying out the Lord's Supper as in Corinthians. Whether he is establishing doctrine, offering reproof or correcting doctrinal errors, the meat of the message is found in the body of each individual letter.

Paul also modifies the traditional conclusion of a Greek letter, giving it his own flavor. Paul transforms the customary brief farewell into final blessing.¹⁰³

¹⁰²Sanders, pp. 348-52.

¹⁰³Marxsen, p. 25.

There are also instances where he inserts a salutation at the end of a dictated portion of Scripture (II Thessalonians 3:17; I Corinthians 16:21; Colossians 4:18).

Bahr, in studying Greek documents, finds a parallel between the ending of records and the close of Paul's epistles. He mentions the two parts of a record--the body (soma) and the subscription (hupographe). He also notes features in Greek and non-Greek documents with a similar format in Latin records. Normally the body is found in the hand of the author or in the hand of his agent. The subscriber is named and identified at the end of the body.¹⁰⁴

Another distinguishing feature of the subscription is that it serves to make legally binding the agreement which the scribe has written in an appropriate form. Since the subscription is, in fact, a summary of the record in the subscriber's own words or those of his agent, it is almost as though the author has written the record himself.

Letters during the first century frequently show two hands: the body in the first hand and a signature (post scriptum) in a second hand. Most of the letters of the New Testament period contain little more than "good-bye" written in the second hand. Other letters have a signature in which one or more items not discussed in the body are mentioned. After the secretary completes the

¹⁰⁴Bahr, p. 29.

letter, the author then writes an intimate, personal note in the signature.

In contrast to the signature, the subscription is not usually a summary of the body; it is a second personal letter by the author, not bound by the strict formality of the body. Bahr points to Paul's use of the subscription in Colossians 4:18: "The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen." Paul's hand also appears in II Thessalonians 3:17; I Corinthians 16:21; and Romans 16:22.¹⁰⁵

The final chapter of Romans provides a classic example of Paul's modification of the subscription. Romans 16 begins with a commendation of Phoebe, followed by an extensive list of greetings at the end of which he reminds the Romans to "salute one another with an holy kiss." Other topics he touches upon concern those who instigate dissension. He offers a benediction and greeting also from Tertius the scribe, culminating in a closing doxology. Normally a letter ends with greetings, followed by a valediction and date, but Paul utilizes an unusual arrangement to close the epistle to the Romans, as he does with each of the Church Epistles.

Each Church Epistle is presented as an individual entity, an appetizing and well-balanced meal, complete in itself. The opening section, like an appetizer, offers a salutation and thanksgiving to start the meal and prepare

¹⁰⁵Bahr, p. 36.

the reader for more. The opening gives insight into the writer as well as his attitude toward those to whom he is writing. From the opening Paul leads into the body, the main course, the meat of the matter. Here the Apostle unfolds his message. Often the meal concludes with the subscription in Paul's own hand. Like the dessert of the meal, this section is often sweet and intimate, closing the communication with a personal touch. The format of the ancient Greek letter is by no means new, but Paul, as an inspired master chef adapts the traditional forms to his own specifications, producing a matchless dining experience for his readers.

Although Paul's total New Testament works also include the pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus as well as the Book of Hebrews, also believed to have been written by him, the Church Epistles display a perfection and stylistic brilliance in form and content. Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians make up this outstanding array of Pauline Epistles. Bullinger comments on the significance of these seven epistles, noting that the number seven indicates spiritual perfection. With two epistles addressed to the Church at Corinth and two addressed to the Church of the Thessalonians, there are a total of nine epistles, the square of three which also represents completeness or divine perfection.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶Bullinger, The Church Epistles, p. 9.

In discussing the content of these works, Bullinger says:

In these epistles we have the perfect embodiment of the Spirit's teaching for the 'guide' to (the Church). They contain 'all the truth' into which the Spirit of Truth was to 'guide.' They contain the things which Christ could not speak on earth, for the time of such teaching was not then. They contain all 'the things to come.' They glorify Christ.¹⁰⁷

Not only is the number of the epistles significant, but the order of the Church Epistles is particularly noteworthy. In the numerous Greek manuscripts investigated, the order of the Church Epistles never varies. There are variations in the order of the books of the New Testament--the Gospels, Acts, the general and other Pauline epistles as well as the Book of Revelation--yet the order of these seven works is always the same. Chronologically they belong to a period considerably before the Gospels and other New Testament writings. The wide range of chronological speculation places most of the writing of the Church Epistles around the middle of the first century. The order of the epistles was set by Paul who collected the scrolls and established the order (II Timothy 4:13). The order then is canonical rather than chronological. Thessalonians is believed to have been written first, but it appears last in the canon because of its unique message. Thessalonians deals with the return of Christ, the gathering together,

¹⁰⁷Bullinger, The Church Epistles, p. 9.

which is the culmination of the administration of the Church of Grace.

Of the six books preceding Thessalonians, the Church Epistles fall into two specific groups: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians. Each book can be classified by the nature of its contents. The basis for the classification is Paul's declaration regarding the profit of all Scripture in II Timothy 3:16. The God-breathed Word is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, . . . (which is) instruction in righteousness." The content of each Church Epistle places it into one of three categories: doctrinal, reproof, or correctional epistles.¹⁰⁸

Three of the Church Epistles--Romans, Ephesians, and Thessalonians--are doctrinal. They lay the foundation for proper instruction and doctrine. Bullinger quotes Lightfoot in commenting on the similarity between Romans and Ephesians: "Both alike partake of the character rather of a formal treatise than a familiar letter."¹⁰⁹ Wierwille also mentions that Romans, Ephesians and Thessalonians are not epistles in content but more distinctively treatises with more formal and more doctrinal information than casual epistolary information.¹¹⁰ These epistles were originally

¹⁰⁸Bullinger, The Church Epistles, p. 15.

¹⁰⁹Bullinger, The Church Epistles, p. 17.

¹¹⁰Wierwille, The Church, p. 7.

written to establish a sound doctrinal base upon which the Church could be launched.

When the Church did not adhere to the proper doctrine, the believers began to practice error. Corinthians was written to correct the practical error resulting from a failure to follow Romans. Hence Corinthians follows Romans in inspired order. Bullinger stresses the canonical order of these two epistles as opposed to their chronological order:

We do not mean that the Corinthians had read the Epistle to the Romans (Romans was not written until afterwards) and then departed from its teaching. But that, as a Church, they had failed to give a practical manifestation of it, individually, socially, and ecclesiastically.¹¹¹

What is written in the doctrinal epistles is taught before it is written. If followers adhere to what is taught, no reproof nor correction is necessary. Because the Corinthians fail to follow the doctrine of Romans, they begin to practice error. Likewise, Philippians is written to correct wrong practices among those who fail to follow the teaching of Ephesians. Both are reproof epistles in that they bring errors to the reader's attention.

Once the Church begins to practice error, that error develops into doctrine which soundly contradicts the initial proper instruction given in the doctrinal epistles.

¹¹¹Bullinger, The Church Epistles, 106.

Galatians and Colossians are correctional epistles written in response to doctrinal error caused by failure to follow the teachings of Romans and Ephesians, respectively. Romans and Galatians reflect certain similarities, as do Ephesians and Colossians. What is doctrinally presented in the initial epistles is repeated in the following epistles of correction.

The order of the Church Epistles reveals a remarkable balance and symmetry. Romans, Ephesians and Thessalonians--three doctrinal epistles--provide the foundation, center, and ceiling of a superstructure. In between are set the two pairs of reproof and correction epistles. Bullinger also notes that there is an arrangement in terms of the area to which the epistles are addressed. Four churches are in the western half of the Roman Empire (Europe), while three are in the Eastern half (Asia). He comments, "Each one answers the other, West to West and East to East."¹¹² Any understanding of Paul's style in each of the Church Epistles must be preceded first of all by an awareness of the relationship of the works as a unit:

¹¹²Bullinger, The Church Epistles, p. 15.

WEST	Romans (Doctrine and Instruction)	
	Corinthians (Reproof)	WEST
	Galatians (Correction)	EAST
EAST	Ephesians (Doctrine and Instruction)	
	Philippians (Reproof)	WEST
	Colossians (Correction)	EAST
WEST	Thessalonians (Doctrine and Instruction) ¹¹³	

An overall examination of the Church Epistles according to classification reveals distinctive stylistic features. Viewing the works as a whole provides an understanding of the interrelationship of each of its parts. It is similar to examining a piece of exquisitely crafted jewelry, a cameo bracelet of seven delicately carved stones. Great beauty is seen in the total composition of the bracelet; yet there is a detailed loveliness and craftsmanship reflected in the bas-relief of each individual cameo. An analysis of the organization, content, audience, and the cultural influences of each epistle should provide a striking cameo view of each of the seven Church Epistles.

¹¹³Bullinger, The Church Epistles, p. 15.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Church Epistles: The Works Themselves

While the works of Paul are noteworthy as a unit, a careful study of each epistle offers further insight into Paul's art. Each varies in style and content according to its intended audience. Depending upon his audience, Paul maintains a certain posture, resulting in a distinct tone. His word choice, syntax, use of Scripture, and every stylistic device is audience-oriented. Paul, inspired by God, writes specifically to meet the needs of his addressees.

A. The Epistle to the Romans

Of the Church Epistles, Romans stands out as the first of three doctrinal works. In commenting on the appropriateness of this epistle as a starting point, Bullinger describes Romans as "the ABC of the believer's education."¹¹⁴ It provides a complete curriculum of study for the knowledgeable Christian. Romans takes man from his lowest state (1:26) and elevates him to a lofty position with Christ. In this doctrinal epistle the believer is made aware of the "wrath of God" from which he is saved by means of justification. Outstanding among its phrases is "the just shall live by faith" (1:17). The heart of the message centers around the

¹¹⁴Bullinger, The Companion Bible, p. 1661.

believer's identification with Christ through his baptism, death, burial and resurrection, as in Romans 6:1-5:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

Another subject treated in Romans is the Gospel of God, introduced in the first verse of the book and elaborated upon in the following five verses. Paul also distinguishes between "sins, the products of the old nature, the fruits of the old tree" and "sin--the old nature itself, the old tree itself."¹¹⁵ In the section prior to chapter nine, Paul discusses Jew and Gentile as individuals to whom he relates the message of justification by faith. In chapters nine through eleven, he relates specific information to Jew and Gentiles.

Unlike the epistle which follows, Romans is not geared to the problems of a specific audience. Bullinger quotes Ellicott who makes a statement about the impetus behind the writing to the Romans: "It does not appear to

¹¹⁵Bullinger, The Church Epistles, p. 27.

have been called forth by any particular circumstances . . . but was designed to set forth the origin and development of the Church of Christ."¹¹⁶ As a doctrinal epistle it sets forth instruction in a simple straightforward manner, without particular reference to the locale of the addressees. There are a few indications that the message may be of particular importance to believers as citizens of Rome.

A possible concern for a certain segment of the population in Rome may be noted in the numerous references to the Jews since a sizeable portion of the population of Rome may have been Jewish. Conybeare and Howson call attention to the many converts who were former Jews in Rome. The "Trastevere," inhabited by numerous Jews and known as the "Ghetto of the ancient Rome," was a well known section of the capital of the Empire. The Jewish community consisted not only of slaves but manumitted persons as well, some of whom achieved wealth and influence.¹¹⁷ Although Paul discussed Jew-Gentile relationships in a similar context in Galatians, the tone is decidedly different in Romans, undoubtedly because of the lack of Judaizing elements in Rome. Unlike the Galatians who are zealous for the law, the faith (believing) of the Romans is spoken of throughout the world (Romans 1:8).

¹¹⁶Bullinger, The Church Epistles, pp. 175-76.

¹¹⁷Conybeare & Howson, p. 677.

Paul's use of numerous quotations from the Old Testament may also be an indication of the sizeable Jewish population in Rome. Certainly the former Jews would readily relate to the Scriptures which Paul uses to establish the doctrinal foundation for both former Jew and Gentile converts. Many of Paul's scriptural references center around the law. In the New Testament one of the Greek words for law is nomos. Of its more than 190 usages in the New Testament, two-thirds occur in the epistles written by Paul, most frequently in Romans and Galatians. Nomos is used twenty-three times in chapter seven of Romans alone.

Another aspect that may have special significance to the Romans is Paul's use of legal terminology which those at Rome could fully comprehend. Because of Rome's renown legal system and the city's association with jurisprudence, those at Rome could fully comprehend and appreciate his message. Paul utilizes a whole series of words derived from the noun dike, meaning "right, just." One of the foundational phrases is "the just shall live by faith." Elsewhere in the epistle, the word is translated "right." Numerous derivations of the word appear in Romans.¹¹⁸ Paul speaks of "just or righteous" (dikaiois) as in Romans 2:13: "For not the hearers of the law are

¹¹⁸Bullinger, The Companion Bible, app. 191, p. 209.

just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. . . ." Dikaiosis means the "act of God's justifying us" (5:18). The "sis" corresponds to "ing."¹¹⁹ Another form is the verb dikaioo, meaning "to set forth as righteous," "to justify." Of the forty times this form is used in the New Testament, fifteen occur in the initial doctrinal epistle.¹²⁰ An example of its use as "justify" is 4:2: "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God." Additional forms include dikaosune, meaning "righteousness" which occurs thirty-six times in Romans. Diakaioma, translated "justification," is used in 5:18 and 8:4 where it is rendered "righteousness" and "justification: in Romans 5:16."¹²¹

Bullinger maintains that Romans is focused around legal terms. He asserts: "The righteousness of God has been procured and revealed and imputed to the sinner; and this is the believing sinner's justification before Him."¹²² The term "righteousness of God" occurs eight times in the first eight chapters, while "imputed" (also translated "reckoned," "counted") is used twelve times in the same section.¹²³ Since one of the crucial points of understanding

¹¹⁹Bullinger, The Companion Bible, app. 191, p. 209.

¹²⁰Bullinger, The Companion Bible, app. 191, p. 209.

¹²¹Bullinger, The Companion Bible, app. 191, p. 209.

¹²²Bullinger, The Church Epistles, p. 27.

¹²³Bullinger, The Companion Bible, app. 191, p. 209.

centers around the matter of justification, Paul uses very cogent legal expressions that indicate the believer has been decreed not guilty. The legality upon which the believer's state is based is doubly reinforced by the use of legal terminology.

In the first verse of Romans, chapter one, Paul presents himself and introduces the Gospel of God. The first sixteen verses are part of the epistolary section, whereby he sets the tone for the letter and establishes his thesis. The doctrinal section covers Romans 1:16-8:39, as Paul unfolds the gospel of God. The long doctrinal section crescendoes in a succession of rhetorical questions which Paul answers with a resounding "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors" (8:37). This section is among the most eloquent passages in the New Testament:

What shall we then say to these things?
 If God be for us, who can be against us?
 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?
 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.
 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.
 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?
 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (8:31-39)

From the doctrinal section, Paul discusses God's relationship to Jew and Gentile in chapters nine through eleven. The remainder of the epistle centers around the practical aspects of an individual believer's life. Paul closes with a post script in which he alludes to the "mystery" before the final verse in praise to "God only wise."

B. The Epistles to the Corinthians

Two of the longest epistles written by Paul are those to the Corinthians. In this set of correctional epistles, the Apostle has much to say about the error of their ways. Following an introduction in the first nine verses, Paul begins to set in proper order certain erroneous practices of the Corinthians. He begins with a discussion of the schisms (schisma, translated "division") among the believers. Then he reproveth other practices which are contrary to the doctrine given in Romans. Paul points out specific problems related to abhorrent sexual practices (5:1), marriage (7:1ff), the Lord's Supper (11:20ff), misuse of the manifestations of the holy spirit

(12:1ff), the resurrection and the return of Christ (15:12ff). Because Paul attempts to get the Corinthians back on the proper doctrinal track, he uses the exhortation--"Be ye followers of me"--which he employs in I Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1: "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me." "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

Corinth was undoubtedly a contributing factor to the corrupt practices Paul discusses in these epistles of reproof. As a harbor city on the Isthmus of Achaia, Corinth reigned as a commercial center of wealth and luxury. One of its dominant features was its Greek architecture. Its elevated temples, public buildings, and impressive edifices were an inescapably visible part of the Corinthian skyline. When Paul speaks of himself as the "wise masterbuilder" (architekton--architect) in the context of laying a foundation and building, he is speaking directly to a Corinthian audience whose lives daily involve architecture. The reference to the "Temple of God" also has particular impact for the Church at Corinth.

Not only was Corinth a center of architectural splendor, it had an unsurpassed reputation as a pinnacle of promiscuity. Immorality was often expressed in terms referring to the prominent Greek capital. Poets and writers spoke of the "Corinthian girl," "Corinthian sickness," and "to live like Corinthians" or "to Corinthinize," terms

which took on a universal understanding as expressions of wantonness.¹²⁴

Much of the corruption of Corinth centered around sex. Idolatry was rampant and lured many converts back into former depraved sexual practices (I Corinthians 6:9-11). Among the pagan practices which thrived in Corinth was the cult of Aphrodite Pandemos whose imposing temple with its thousand "priestesses" did service to the goddess of love. Understandably Paul speaks bluntly about the sexual problem, particularly regarding the incestuous practices of a certain individual in the opening of chapter five. He devotes a lengthy discussion to marriage in chapter seven in an effort to correct certain misunderstandings. Continually he points out the errors of the Corinthians while offering concrete methods to correct their mis-directed efforts.

Because Corinthians is a reproof epistle, its tone is markedly different from the straightforwardness of Romans. Romans is positive, direct, and offers information to be learned; Corinthians is corrective, written to reprimand those who have strayed from the path. Note the direct approach in stating the believer's position in Christ in Romans 4:4-6:

¹²⁴Conybeare & Howson, p. 376.

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.

Compare a similar situation expressed somewhat more obliquely in I Corinthians 15:13-15:

But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

Paul's attitude toward the Corinthians is expressed early in the epistle when he refers to them as "carnal" in 3:1-3:

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

Paul desires to share the depths of the mystery which has been revealed to him, but the Church at Corinth is so involved in petty jealousies and divisions that they cannot receive more than the elementary message, "Christ and him crucified" (2:1). Since they have not mastered the basic

curriculum of Romans, how can they proceed with advanced knowledge concerning the "deep things of the mystery" (Chapter 2)?

Another aspect of the tone in Corinthians is Paul's masterful use of the Old Testament. Paul uses more scripture in this epistle than in Romans or Galatians.¹²⁵ Most of the direct quotations from the Old Testament are introduced by a phrase such as "For it is written," "As it is written," "He saith," or by no introduction at all. Rather than using the rhetorical "What saith the Scripture," he declares his message directly from the Old Testament. The basis for reproof is the Word of God which Paul skillfully relates throughout the Epistles addressed to the Corinthians.

Despite the occasionally sharp tone of the Corinthian epistles, Paul still writes some impressive prose. The beauty of expression in I Corinthians 13 is unsurpassed in its definition of the love of God. The familiar "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels and have not charity" flows within the context of spiritual matters. The well-known last verse--"Now abideth faith, hope, charity; these three but the greatest of these is charity"--dramatically closes one of the most recognized sections in the New Testament. Another piece of masterfully rendered prose is the logical yet lovely unfolding of truth regarding the resurrection in I Corinthians 15.

¹²⁵Bullinger, The Church Epistles, p. 90

The beauty of Corinthians is displayed not only in some of its language, the structure of these epistles also reveals a symmetry and a divine design. Following the introduction in the first nine verses, Paul offers reproof and explanation of error in most of the first four chapters. At the end of chapter four he discusses Timothy whom he describes as "my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you in remembrance of all my ways. . . ." Paul then discusses his intended visit to them in 4:18-21. Chapters five and six involve a discussion of matters Paul has heard concerning certain sexual practices and legal matters among the Corinthians. The writer touches upon matters about which the Corinthians have written to him: marriage and "things offered unto idols." The reproof and explanatory section of the first four chapters is balanced by a similar section in Chapters 9-15. In the same manner that Paul earlier mentions a proposed visit, he talks of his coming visit in 16:1-9. Once more he speaks of Timothy in verse 10 of the last chapter. He concludes with a salutation and a final "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen."

The scope of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians is the same as the first. As in I Corinthians the doctrine is set forth indirectly as reason or explanation for the requested obedience. In bringing to the minds of the Corinthians their departure from the doctrine of Romans,

Paul devotes more than half of the epistle to explanatory reproof. The structure reflects the balance between the introductory and concluding epistolary sections. Following the salutation in verses one and two of the opening chapter, Paul moves into the thanksgiving in verses 3-11. From there he discusses his ministry and begins the epistolary section. In the same manner as he began, Paul closes with a salutation.

C. The Epistle to the Galatians

If error is practiced long enough, it eventually becomes doctrine. Such is the case with the people of Galatia. The Epistle to the Galatians is correctional in that it attempts to correct the wrong doctrine due to failure to adhere to the proper instruction of Romans. In Romans 1:1 Paul unfolds the Gospel of God, while he marvels "that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another. . ." (Galatians 1:6,7a). There are noticeable parallels between the two books. Although Galatians is written prior to Romans, Paul has taught the Galatians the same truths he later records in Romans. Bullinger notes the relationship between the two works: "Galatians has been happily likened to a sketch for the finished picture Romans."¹²⁶

¹²⁶Bullinger, The Companion Bible, p. 1748.

Galatia, known as "Gaul," was a province in central Asia Minor. The exact location of the churches of Galatia is not known. The term "Galatians" refers to "Barbarians," a mixed race of Keltic (Celtic) origin. They migrated into Asia Minor, plundering as a moveable army rather than a nation. The area of Galatia is sometimes referred to as Gallo-Graecia and shows a marked influence of the Greeks on their language and culture.¹²⁷

Paul begins the Epistle to the Galatians by asserting himself as an Apostle--"not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the father, who raised him from the dead" (1:1). He spends a great deal of time giving his credentials and establishing his authority and credibility as a spokesman for God. Much of the epistle concentrates on teaching concerning the legalistic Judaizers who attempt to lead the Galatians back into the bondage of the Law. Paul also reiterates that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile (3:28). Another point of similarity with Romans is the emphasis on justification by faith as in 2:16 and 3:11:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

¹²⁷Conybeare & Howson, p. 186.

But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.

Other similarities and differences can be noted in comparing the two epistles. As with the Book of Romans, Galatians centers much of its discussion around the law (nomos). There are several references to Jews and Gentiles, as in Galatians 2:13-15. In addition other terms are contrasted in Galatians, such as "flesh and spirit" (5:16ff); "law and grace" (5:4); and "bondmaid and freewoman," expressed as an allegory (4:22ff). Both Romans and Galatians employ the exclamation "God forbid." It is used thirteen times in these two epistles.

As a correctional epistle, the language of Galatians is pointed. Paul wants those in Galatia to get back on the right doctrinal path, and his word choice is often strong, as in the following remarks:

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?
(3:1)

I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain. (4:11)

I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you. (4:20)

Paul refers to the Galatians as "foolish" or "senseless," indicating that they never use their minds in matters of importance.¹²⁸ He expresses his concern by saying "I am

¹²⁸Bullinger, The Companion Bible, p. 1752.

afraid for you," rather than the mistranslated "afraid of you."¹²⁹ Finally Paul speaks specifically of his tone of voice in 4:20 where the word "voice" should be translated "tone."¹³⁰ He goes on to express his doubts about their behavior. His attitude is reflected in the language to those whom he writes.

Paul's language is particularly harsh in his caustic play on words in response to those Jews who attempt to enforce circumcision: "I would they were even cut off which trouble you" (5:12). Paul may be alluding to certain bizarre practices associated with the Phrygians in the cult of Cybele. The Revised Version renders the verse: "I would they would even cut themselves off." Certainly Paul graphically illustrates his disgust with the Judaizers.

Not only does the language of the book of Galatians give insight into Paul's style, the structure also reveals a pattern of alternation in unfolding the correctional information. From the opening salutation in the opening five verses, Paul begins to express his concern for the churches of Galatia: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him who called you in the grace of Christ unto another gospel." The section of solicitude continues through 2:14. An explanatory section follows in an effort

¹²⁹Wierwille, "Galatians," New Knoxville, Ohio, n.d.

¹³⁰Bullinger, The Companion Bible, p. 1755.

to redirect the Galatians to a sound doctrinal foundation. Paul follows each doctrinal section with another section of solicitude. He maintains this pattern of alternation between doctrine and solicitude throughout the epistle until the final benediction in 6:18 which corresponds to the opening salutation.

D. The Epistle to the Ephesians

The second of the three great doctrinal treatises is Ephesians. Romans ends its doctrinal revelation with chapter eight. Ephesians is built upon the foundation laid in Romans where Paul writes concerning the believers having died, been buried, and risen with Christ. The Epistle to the Ephesians takes the believer into an even higher realm-- "the heavenlies." The third verse of the first chapter reveals the believer's position in Christ: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. . ." (1:3). The term "heavenly places" literally means "the heavenlies" and is used in four other places in the epistle (1:20, 2:6, 3:10, and 6:12).

Not only does Paul write of the believer's heavenly position, he adds further light regarding "the mystery." In the last chapter of Romans Paul alludes to "the mystery" as the book concludes. In Ephesians he makes known the greatness of the "great mystery," which has been

hidden in God before the foundations of the world until revealed to Paul. Ephesians fully unfolds this "great secret" of the administration of the Church of Grace. The word musterion is used six times in Ephesians. Progressively Paul receives exclusive revelation regarding "the mystery," and he heralds its truth in lucid detail in Ephesians 3:1-9:

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,
 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:
 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,
 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;
 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.
 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;
 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things. . . . (3:1-9)

Although Paul relates his knowledge in the mystery, he does not attempt to explain his authority nor justify his exclusive revelation. The tone of Ephesians, like Romans, is clear-cut and direct, as Paul gives instruction

with clarity and simplicity. As a doctrinal epistle, it is written to instruct rather than in response to particular erroneous practices in the Church.

The epistles begin with a salutation "to the saints which are at Ephesus." Some manuscripts, however, omit the words "at Ephesus" in the opening verse. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus" (1:1). The epistle is undoubtedly encyclical.¹³¹ The space where "at Ephesus" has been added was originally left blank and the locations of various churches were filled in as the epistle circulated. All of the epistles were intended to be read aloud and transferred from one Church to another as Colossians 4:16 indicates: "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea." The nature of this particular epistle as a doctrinal piece of communication intended to be circulated probably accounts for the lack of topical allusions and specific matters related primarily to the Ephesians.

As a cosmopolitan center of international renown, the city of Ephesus boasted of the temple to Diana, one of the ancient wonders of the world, and it provided a diverse

¹³¹Wierwille, "Ephesians," New Knoxville, Ohio, 10 Sept. 1974.

cultural milieu. As a thriving commercial, religious, and intellectual complex, Ephesus provided the same kind of environment which precipitated some of the difficulties in Corinth; yet there are no specific Ephesian problems identified.

Because of its content and its more formal presentation, Ephesians could be classified as a treatise. Ephesians opens with a doctrinal section, covering 1:3-3:13. The perfection of the doctrinal aspect is seen in its seven major presentations. Beginning with Ephesians 1:3-14 Paul discusses "the will of God, the work of the Son, and the witness of the spirit." The second presentation is in verses 15-19 of the first chapter, expressing God's desire "that ye may know." Paul goes on to mention the believer being quickened, raised and seated together. Ephesians 2:8-10 deals with "works," not the individual's but God's. A discussion of "peace" follows in verses 11-19 of the second chapter. The doctrinal section closes with two references to being "together" in 2:19-22 as well as 3:1-13.¹³²

The doctrinal section with its seven points is balanced by seven major presentations in the practical section which covers Ephesians 4:1-6:20. Opening the practical part is a discussion of the "walk" in 4:1-6.

¹³²Wierwille, "Ephesians."

Paul proceeds to mention Christ and his accomplishments in 4:7-19. Next follows an exhortation to "put off the old and put on the new" in 4:20-32. A discussion of the three-fold "walk" (in light, in love, and circumspectly) follows in 5:1-6:9. The final chapter includes a discussion of "stand" in 6:10-13 and "the whole armour" in verses 14-18. The section concludes with an exhortation that Paul may be able to open his mouth and speak boldly.¹³³

The doctrinal discussion is perfectly balanced with the practical application to the believer's life. The prayer at the end of the third chapter acts as the foundation of the balance. It is a noble piece of prose, one of the most eloquent examples in the Book of Ephesians:

For this cause I bow my knees unto the
 Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 Of whom the whole family in heaven and
 earth is named,
 That he would grant you, according to the
 riches of his glory, to be strengthened
 with might by his spirit in the inner man;
 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by
 faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded
 in love,
 May be able to comprehend with all saints
 what is the breadth, and length, and
 depth, and height;
 And to know the love of Christ, which pas-
 seth knowledge, that ye might be filled
 with all the fulness of God.
 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding
 abundantly above all that we ask or think,
 according to the power that worketh in us,
 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ
 Jesus throughout all ages, world without
 end. Amen (3:14-21).

¹³³Wierwille, "Ephesians."

In addition to Paul's extensive use of the term musterion in Ephesians, he also employs three terms in particularly distinctive ways throughout the epistle. He uses three verbs--"sit," "walk," and "stand"--to instruct the believer as to his privileges and responsibilities. God's view of the believer is made known in the prayer at the end of chapter one:¹³⁴

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of Glory, may give unto you
the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the
knowledge of him:

The eyes of your understanding being
enlightened; that ye may know what is
the hope of his calling, and what the
riches of the glory of his inheritance
in the saints,
And what is the exceeding greatness of
his power to usward who believe, accord-
ing to the working of his mighty power,
Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised
him from the dead, and set him at his own
right hand in the heavenly places,
Far above all principality, and power, and
might, and dominion, and every name that
is named, not only in this world, but also
in that which is to come: (1:17-21)

According to Bullinger, the word "set" in verse 20 should be translated "sat."¹³⁵ In 2:6, Paul goes on to reveal where the believer has been made to sit: "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The believer's position in terms of the verb "sit" is clarified in the doctrinal section.

¹³⁴ Watchman Nee, Sit, Walk, Stand, p. ix.

¹³⁵ Bullinger, The Companion Bible, p. 1762.

Once the doctrine is made known in an understandable manner, the truths therein can be applied in a practical way. In the practical section of Ephesians Paul gives instruction on how to live as a Christian. The practical section opens with an exhortation "to walk worthy:" "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." Verse seventeen of Chapter four indicates how not to walk: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind." The fifth chapter of Ephesians discusses the three-fold walk: the walk in love, the walk in light, and the walk circumspectly (5:2,8,15).

The discussion of "stand" is confined to chapter six where the word is used four times:

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; (6:11-14)

"Stand" is used in the conclusion of the practical section to remind the believer of his responsibility. Once he recognizes his position and realizes where he has been

seated, he can walk effectually before God and men. Finally, Paul reinforces the exhortation to "stand" as a champion goes to the victor's stand to receive an award at the end of an athletic contest. In the spiritual battle, the Christian is exhorted to "withstand . . . and having done all, to stand."¹³⁶

In light of its message regarding the mystery, Ephesians stands out as "the greatest revelation to the Church."¹³⁷ Not only does its content indicate an exclusive aspect of Paul's style, its structure also reveals a unique design.

E. The Epistle to the Philippians

Founded by the father of Alexander the Great, and called the "place of fountains," Philippi was a free city that enjoyed the privileges of a Roman colony. It is to "all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi," that the Epistle to the Philippians is addressed. As a colony, the city was a miniature replica of Rome. The account in Acts 16 reveals the pride the Philippians had as citizens of the Roman Empire.

Paul thus makes references to citizenship in this epistle of reproof. In verse twenty-seven of the first

¹³⁶Wierwille, "Athletes of the Spirit," New Knoxville, Ohio, n.d.

¹³⁷Wierwille, "Ephesians."

chapter, Paul offers the following instruction:

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

The words "let your conversation" are translated from the Greek word politeuomai. The verb refers to "citizenship," or to "exercise one's citizenship." In the same way that the Philippians enjoy certain rights and privileges as citizens of a free city, Paul reminds them to live according to their heavenly citizenship.¹³⁸ The epistle uses another form of the same word in Philippians 3:20: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." In this instance the word "conversation" is the noun, politeuma, meaning "the seat of government." The Revised Version translates the word "citizenship" (commonwealth). The term indicates privileges and responsibilities. Again the emphasis is upon heavenly citizenship in contrast to the citizenship the Philippians so proudly exercise.¹³⁹

Philippians, as an epistle of reproof, calls attention to practical error caused by not following the instruction of Ephesians. Philippians corresponds to Corinthians

¹³⁸Wierwille, "God Rescued Us," in The Bible Tells Me So, Vol. I of Studies in Abundant Living, pp. 58-59.

¹³⁹Bullinger, The Companion Bible, p. 1778.

in showing how to return to sound doctrine. As in Corinthians, on two occasions Paul exhorts the Philippians to follow his example: "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample" (3:17) and "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (4:9).

In 3:17 Paul modifies the word "followers" translated from mimetes, a word transliterated into the English word "mimic." He adds the prefix sum, meaning "in close proximity," "in conjunction with," to form summimetes ("followers together"). This unique usage is found only in Philippians.¹⁴⁰

Even though Philippians offers reproof, its overall tone is not as caustic as is the tone of Corinthians. There are instances of somewhat harsh language, however. In 3:2 Paul sternly warns: "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision." The phrase "Beware of dogs" is an extremely cutting epithet which describes Paul's disgust with the Judaizers. Dogs are considered scavengers and held in lowest esteem among the Jews. In the same way that a sign--Beware of Dog--is posted today, Paul warns the Philippians of impending danger.

Another example of Paul's forceful language occurs in verse eight of chapter three. Here Paul evaluates his

¹⁴⁰Bullinger, The Companion Bible, p. 1778.

former credentials against the knowledge of Christ:

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.

Previously Paul relates his background which could have been a source of pride; indeed, the citizens of Philippi might be impressed by such an outstanding Roman citizen. Paul, however, informs them that he counts all these supposed assets loss. He goes on to relate the degree to which he regards his former accomplishments. The writer refers to excrement only in Philippians.

One of the contrasting aspects of Philippians as a reproof epistle is the way in which Paul weaves threads of joy and rejoicing throughout his message. His use of the words "joy" and "rejoicing" is even more remarkable when one realizes that Philippians is one of the epistles written during Paul's imprisonment.¹⁴¹ Despite the circumstances of his writing and the nature of the message, Paul manages to elevate the language and overflow with joy in the introduction where the noun chara is first used: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine making request with joy" (1:3-4). Chara is also employed in 1:25, 2:2, and 4:1.

¹⁴¹Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians were written while Paul was in prison in Rome. They are occasionally referred to as the Prison Epistles.

Not only does Paul use joy as a noun, he also makes use of the verb chairō (to joy). An instance of double usage of both noun and verb is seen in 2:17,18: "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me." "Rejoice" is chairō with the prefix sun, suggesting close proximity or close association with. There are numerous other occasions where Paul employs the verb "rejoice" (2:28; 3:1,3; and 4:4,10). Understandably Philippians is sometimes referred to as the "joy epistle."

The structure of Philippians again gives further insight into the design and construction of this reproof epistle. The structural pattern is one of introversion, as Paul reverses the order of the information in the second half of the epistle. He opens with a salutation and proceeds to express his care and concern for the Philippians in most of the first chapter. The writer cites the exhortation and example of Jesus Christ, followed by a discussion of Timothy as an example to the addressees. Another example is given with Epaphroditus followed by the exhortation and example of Paul. In the same way that Paul expressed his concern for the Philippians, he writes of their concern for him prior to the closing four verses which offer final salutations.

F. The Epistle to the Colossians

The final correctional document of the seven Church Epistles is the Epistle to the Colossians, written to correct doctrinal errors because of the failure to follow the revelation of Ephesians. Error, being practiced for so long a time, becomes doctrine. The Book of Colossians thus shows a striking resemblance to Ephesians in the manner that Galatians corresponds to Romans. Colossians attempts to relate once more the believer's union with Christ, having died with him (2:20; 3:3) and risen with him (3:1,4). Other echoes from Ephesians center around recognition of Christ as head of the Church and the necessity of "holding fast the head" (2:19).

Another striking similarity with Ephesians centers around "the mystery." Colossians is encircled by Paul's concern that the "saints and faithful brethren at Colosse" might acknowledge "the mystery." Near the beginning of the epistle Paul unfolds additional aspects of his special ministry regarding "the mystery:"

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (1:25-27)

In the closing lines of the epistle Paul asks for the prayers of the Colossians concerning his preaching of the

"mystery."

Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds. (4:2-3)

Knowledge of the cultural background of Colosse helps explain Paul's extensive reference to "the mystery." Some of the pagan influences which especially troubled the Colossians were the "mystery cults." These cults presented a deceptive counterfeit to Christianity in the first century. Their strange practices centered around a god who dies and is resuscitated. The practitioners of the cult of Isis, for instance, were women striving to be initiated in the various degrees of a secret order. The ritual culminated with initiation into the highest degree of the cult of the Queen of Heaven. During the first century mystery religions were a gross counterfeit and degraded "the great mystery" which Paul revealed throughout the Epistle to the Colossians.

The context of 1:28 involves such a discussion of the most crucial issue of the Church. Paul uses the term "perfect" (teleios) to mean "fully initiated," as in the highest realm of religion:¹⁴² "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

¹⁴² Bullinger, The Companion Bible, app. 125, p. 160.

The language and imagery of Colossians reflects some of the particular concerns of the citizens of Colosse, a city flooded with philosophical and religious speculation. Located near the cities of Hieropolis and Laodicea, just south of the Lycus River in the region of Phrygia, Colosse and its surrounding cities were noted for their numerous pagan deities. Paul mentions the neighboring cities in 2:1 and 4:13,15,16. He also alludes to philosophical and pagan practices which lead the Colossians astray. The region is known not only for its pagan deities but also for its various mystical and philosophical systems. Conybeare and Howson speak of "the mystic fanaticism of Phrygia."¹⁴³ Concerning involvement in the metaphysical, Paul sharply warns the brethren concerning the consequences of being misled: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (2:8).

Literally Paul is saying, "Take heed lest there shall be anyone who makes prey of you through his vain deceitful philosophy, according to the tradition of men, according to the religious ordinances of the world and not according to Christ."¹⁴⁴ Paul's admonition is explicit. He uses the verb sulagogeo in the future tense to

¹⁴³Conybeare & Howson, p. 691.

¹⁴⁴Bullinger, The Church Epistles, p. 187.

indicate present danger more than mere possibility. The word "you" is also emphatic. That particular form of the verb is only used here. "Philosophy," transliterated from philosophia (love of wisdom) is also used only in this verse.

One of the philosophical systems which especially posed problems for the saints at Colosse was Gnosticism. The name is transliterated from the Greek word meaning knowledge, gnosis. Forms of the word are used more than a half dozen times in Colossians. The Gnostics sought salvation through knowledge. According to Gnosticism, spiritual enlightenment gives a man spiritual redemption.¹⁴⁵ Paul plainly points out the true source of wisdom and knowledge in the second chapter:

That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:2,3).

Throughout the epistle Paul endeavors to reestablish a sound foundation so that the readers will not be blown about by winds of doctrine, for many forms of doctrinal error abound. All of these are forms of "will worship" or self-imposed worship. Some of the prevalent practices include worshipping of angels and ascetism (2:20-23).

¹⁴⁵Cummins, "Life and Times," 9 Oct. 1975.

Others at Colosse (2:18) are involved in strict observance of Jewish feasts and sabbaths (2:16). Indeed, the entire epistle reveals the Apostle Paul's concern for philosophical and spiritual matters as he endeavors to redirect the "fleshly minds" of his readers to the truth. The continual references to "wisdom," "knowledge," "thoughts" and "mind" culminate in constant reminders concerning the believer's completeness in Christ. "Christ" is used nineteen times in the epistle, most notably in the second chapter:

For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the
 Godhead bodily.
 And ye are complete in him, which is the
 head of all principality and power: (2:9-10)

The symmetry of the entire epistle is mirrored in its introverted structure. After the opening salutation, Paul discusses reports and messages from Epaphras, "our dear fellow servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ." The next section expresses Paul's concern for the Colossians and his prayer for their acknowledgement of the mystery. The doctrinal correction is offered because of failure to adhere to specific truths of Ephesians: the believer's position having "died with Christ" and having "risen with Christ." Again Paul relates his concern but this time regarding his preaching of the mystery. He follows with reports and messages from Tychicus and Onesimus before closing with the final salutation.

G. The Epistle to the Thessalonians

The final doctrinal documents of the seven Church Epistles are those addressed to the Church of the Thessalonians. There are many unique aspects regarding these works. Although they were the first of the Church Epistles to be written, they appear last in the canon. Their position is related to their message concerning the return of Jesus Christ, the ultimate event for the believers of this administration. Hence, no Church epistle follows Thessalonians. The focus of the epistle is upon the consummation of the Body of Christ when it is joined with its head. Only in Thessalonians is the return of Christ set forth in such glorious detail.

One of the distinctive aspects of the epistle is its doctrinal content. Thessalonica does not provide much insight into the problems of the Thessalonians for they appear to be a model church. Paul offers lavish praise and thanksgiving for their example in the opening lines of the first chapter.

We give thanks to God always for you all,
making mention of you in our prayers;
Remembering without ceasing your work of
faith, and labour of love, and patience
of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the
sight of God and our Father;
Knowing, brethren beloved, your election
of God.
For our gospel came not unto you in word
only, but also in power, and in the Holy
Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know
what manner of men we were among you for
your sake.

And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. (1:2-8)

Paul continues to offer thanks to God for the Thessalonians because of their acceptance of the Word of God in 2:13:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

In II Thessalonians Paul expresses similar gratitude for the Church of the Thessalonians:

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth. (1:3)

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth. (2:13)

The tone of the epistle is decidedly different from all other Church epistles. Not only is the doctrine set forth with clarity and directness, there is an underlying sense of tenderness and intimate concern. This warmth is reflected in verse eleven of chapter two which expresses

the writers' (Paul's, Silas', and Timothy's) concern for the Thessalonians. Paul expresses their regard in terms of a father: "As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children." The verbs "exhorted" and "comforted" also express tenderness, particularly "exhorted" (parakaleo). This term is used almost a dozen times in both epistles. It means "to call aside," "appeal to" (by way of exhortation, entreaty, comfort or instruction). Considering the nature of the message of Thessalonians, Paul's frequent use of the term is understandable.¹⁴⁶

The heart of the message of the final doctrinal epistle is the return of Christ. To express this truth Paul uses the term parousia, which occurs seven times (spiritual perfection) in both epistles. It is translated "coming" and always indicates the personal presence of the one spoken of.¹⁴⁷ The first usage is in 2:19 where it is translated "coming:" "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" Subsequently the term is used in each of the remaining chapters of I Thessalonians to present the second coming of Christ from a different perspective each time. In 3:13 Paul speaks of

¹⁴⁶Bullinger, The Companion Bible, app. 234, p. 164.

¹⁴⁷Wierwille, "I and II Thessalonians," The Way International, New Knoxville, Ohio, n.d.

Jesus Christ coming "with" all his saints: "To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." Paul distinguishes between Jesus Christ "coming for his saints," which is the first part of the parousia and "coming with his saints," which will occur following the return of Christ (II Thessalonians 1:7-10).

In the third usage of parousia, Paul discusses those who will be involved in the return in 4:15: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep." The living will be changed (I Corinthians 15:51) and those asleep (dead) will be "raised incorruptible" (I Corinthians 15:52).

The last usage of the word parousia in the first epistle to the Thessalonians occurs in 5:23: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here Paul prays for the complete perfection of the believer who is set apart and wholly preserved by the God of peace until the coming of Jesus Christ. He uses a figure of speech, polysyndeton, to emphasize each aspect of completeness: "whole spirit and soul and body."

Parousia first occurs in II Thessalonians 2:1:

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord

Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him. . . ."

In this verse is found another aspect of the coming of Jesus Christ, the believers' gathering together unto him. Paul extends the definition of parousia to give comfort and assurance in the face of pressure and misinformation that the return has already taken place.

The final usages of parousia in II Thessalonians occurs in verse 8 of chapter two: "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: . . ."

Paul relates one of the events to take place with the coming of Jesus Christ. With the brilliance, the "shining forth" of the return, the anti-Christ shall be destroyed.

If there is a single word which conveys the heart of the message to the Church of the Thessalonians, it is parousia. Paul uses the term seven times throughout the epistles revealing different facets of the return of Christ. Although the Apostle uses the term elsewhere in the Church Epistles, the usage regarding the second coming of Christ and his personal presence is unique to Thessalonians.

The Epistle to the Church of the Thessalonians stands alone in its content. It offers no reproof, only praise. Paul does not write hesitantly as in Corinthians:

For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:

And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed. (II 12:20,21)

Paul gives thanks:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. (I Thessalonians 2:13)

There is no expression of exasperation as in Galatians:

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" In Thessalonians his response is only more praise: "For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God. . ." (I 3:9). Paul expresses no regrets as in Philippians:

(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) (3:18,19)

Again Paul speaks with tender thanksgiving:

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen

you to salvation through sanctification
of the spirit and belief of the truth.
(II 2:13)

There is no harsh warning as in Colossians: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (2:8). Paul only offers assurance and confidence in the Thessalonians' willingness to serve. "And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you" (II 3:4).

In the first Epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul interlaces thanksgiving and exhortation. Following the first verse, Paul offers thanks for the Thessalonians from 1:2-3:10. A prayer follows in 3:11-13, flowing into exhortation which touches upon the return of Jesus Christ. The heart of the epistle is in the message regarding the parousia. The epistle closes with a prayer and salutation.

The structure of Second Thessalonians opens with a salutation "grace and peace" in verse two. As in the first epistle, Paul offers thanks in verses 6-10. Prayer is offered for the Thessalonians in verses 11-12, followed by a doctrinal section in 2:1-12. Thanksgiving is again offered in 2:13-15. In contrast to the previous prayer, prayer is offered for Paul before the concluding instruction of the final chapter. In the same way that he opens, the Apostle Paul closes the book with a final salutation as the

entire epistle is encircled in grace--"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all."

To behold the artistry of the Church Epistles is to look upon a crown. This magnificently jewelled masterpiece is composed of seven interlinking segments, each with a precious gem at its center. Each segment has its unique pattern and can be admired as a distinctive piece of jewelry in itself. Collectively the seven sections reveal a detailed design and exquisite construction. From the opening line of Romans--"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ . . ."--until the final benediction of II Thessalonians--"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all"--the Church Epistles mirror the character and artistry of the Apostle Paul.

In the same way that a crown displays the skill of a jeweller, the Church Epistles reflect the style of their writer. In modifying the popular epistle format of the first century, Paul presents a dazzling display of various facets of seven literary jewels. His craftsmanship is first seen as he introduces himself with an unusual "calling card"--"Paul a bond slave." His syntax reveals his Hebraic upbringing and the profound influence of his rabbinic background. His word choice, his diverse imagery, and individual stylistic features show his intense desire to communicate. In every word his style shines through, for style is the man himself.

In addition to revealing the style of the writer, the Church Epistles also reveal the "mind" of their author. Paul clarifies his position as writer by recognizing the inspiration behind his works and acknowledging God as the author of the Bible. Author communicates to writer by means of revelation, and writer uses his inimitable style to relate the message. In the same way that each brilliant gem in a crown projects the harmonious contribution of designer and jeweller, so the Church Epistles reflect the harmony of author and writer. God, the author, Paul, the writer, along with the works themselves form a triptych mirror to reflect totally the crowning beauty of the Bible, the world's most treasured literary work.

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