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Fourth in the Series

Division of
Evangelization
and
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So much of what we know about Paul is found in his 13 letters found in the New Testament. They are a mixture of teaching, re-teaching, clarification, personal story telling, and encouragement to friends and converts. If you were to read each of these letters, you would read an encyclopedia of the Christian faith that the Church has used as a foundation. Unlike our experience in today's world of emails and text messaging, at one time creating a "letter" had a formal structure that everyone followed and could expect. Paul was no different except he always added a bit of ethical instruction somewhere after the body of his letter.

He himself would often break his own rule of format, though, and throw different thoughts throughout the letter's body as they occurred to him.

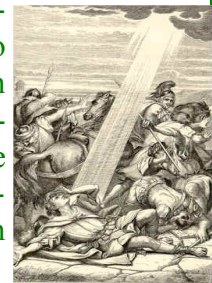
Typical Outline of a Pauline Letter

1. **Opening and Greeting**
2. **Thanksgiving**
3. **Body**
4. **Ethical Instruction**
5. **Closing**

Paul's letters are arranged in the New Testament according to length rather than by chronological order. Therefore, if you wanted to read each of his letters, it may not be wise to simply start at the beginning with Romans, undeniably Paul's greatest treatise and a very complicated letter. It would be wiser to begin with either Philippians or 1 Thessalonians.

Philippians

This letter was written around 56A.D. during one of Paul's times of imprisonment. Despite the hardship and suffering he was experiencing, the letter is remarkably filled with joy. This joy is deeply rooted in his experience and relationship with Jesus. Even though Paul shares with us in Ch. 3 an insight into his Jewish heritage, he considers it "rubbish" compared to what he has gained in Christ. His encounter with Jesus at his conversion and throughout his subsequent life so permeate his living that nothing else matters as much to him. To Paul he can endure anything because of his belief and his relationship with Jesus.



In Chapter 2 of this letter, we find no greater summary of the message of the cross than in St. Paul's hymn (vs. 5-11). In it he calls all of us to model ourselves after Jesus. It calls us all to humility before God. He reminds us that even though he was God, Jesus "deemed equality with God not something to be grasped at..." (vs.6) Paul is letting us know that there is a great difference between humility and humiliation. Recognizing God in his rightful place above us is the proper thing to do. Because of that we will, like Jesus, receive reward and exaltation. "...that at the name of

Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth..." (vs. 10) We also will be rewarded with eternal life.

Reflection (These are opportunities to share in a small group or for personal reflection.)

1. Read Philippians 4:4-7
2. Do you find it easy or difficult to follow Paul's advice? Are you always "rejoicing in the Lord" or do you find it a challenge? Does the world overpower your outlook and relationship with God?
3. As we approach the celebration of Christ's birth and the Incarnation are you able to truly rejoice in this event or do you need to be knocked off your horse and converted?



1 Thessalonians

This letter of St. Paul is his earliest. In fact it is the oldest writing in the New Testament. Written about 50-51 A.D. it is an endearing letter from a pastor who misses the people he converted and shepherded. He praises them for their efforts to live as followers of Jesus and instructs them in additional ways they can improve. One of the main themes of this letter is the Second Coming of Christ. The Christians of Thessalonica seem to have become obsessed with this coming event and often questioned when and how it would occur. He exhorts them to continue to work hard and in their daily lives to be gentle with one another in all that they do. It seems that in latter days it got so bad that many people quit their jobs and were living off of the generosity of others because they figured Christ was coming any day therefore work was futile. In Paul's 2 Thessalonians he actually orders them back to work and suggests that others should not support those who do not work.

This letter becomes an encouragement for us for Paul is telling us all that following Jesus is not easy. It's hard work and that we need to be vigilant for Christ's return. At the same time, we need to deal clearly and definitively with our day-to-day challenges that confront us. Rewards do not come to those who simply sit back and wait but to those who diligently work hard for those rewards.

Some Themes of Paul's Letters:

- 1 Thessalonians - Christ's Second Coming
- 2 Thessalonians - Remaining faithful
- 1 Corinthians - the body of Christ, the Lord's Supper
- 2 Corinthians - Apostleship and true ministry
- Galatians - Gospel, Law, Christian freedom
- Ephesians - the Church as the household of God
- Philippians - joy, suffering, exaltation of Jesus Christ
- Colossians - Christ as head of the body
- Romans - justification by faith, the Holy Spirit, the Law under Christ, Christian freedom
- Philemon - the effects of Christian faith on community relations
- 1 Timothy - ministerial roles in the Church
- 2 Timothy - sound doctrine, remaining faithful in the task of ministry
- Titus - sound doctrine, faithful administration of Christian ministers

Prayer

You are with us, faithful God, revealing yourself in every experience of our lives. Help us to stand firm against all that would take us from you and to rejoice in steadfast perseverance, preferring nothing to your love. We ask this inspired by the life of Jesus and strengthened by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, one God forever. Amen