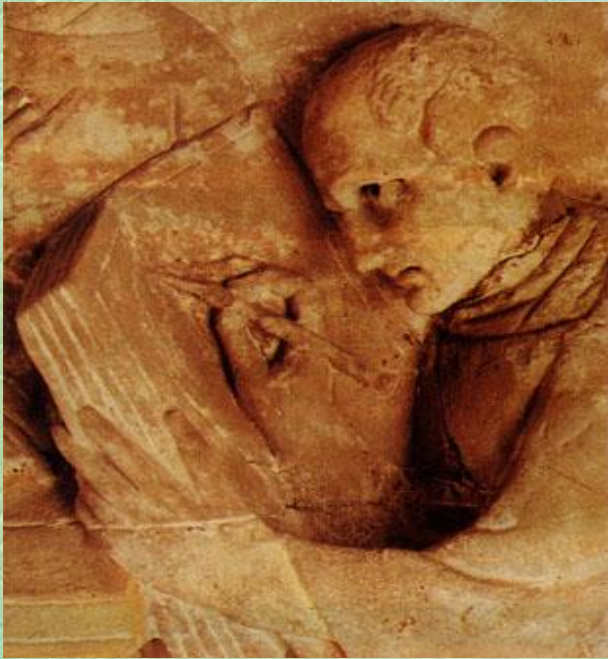


PAUL THE LETTER-WRITER



Paul's Persuasive Prose: The Case of Philemon

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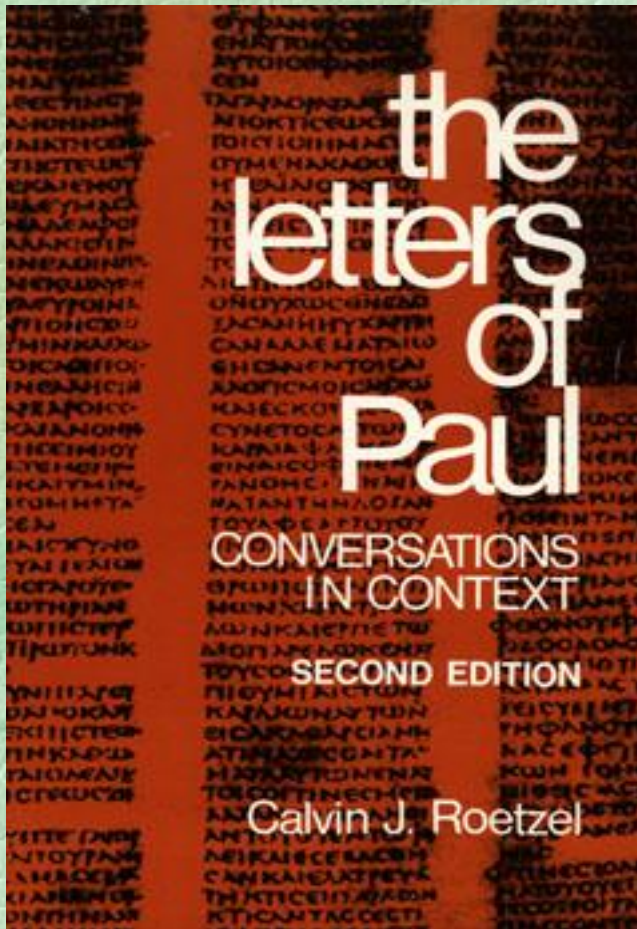
INTRODUCTION

- Illustration: Letter to Jack from Jill

Dear Jack: I am so busy here! The professors give us tons of readings and assignments—way more than we ever had in high school. I have hardly any free time to spend with my new friends. Last week my dormmate and I went to a cool concert.... Well, got to go. Love Jill.



INTRODUCTION

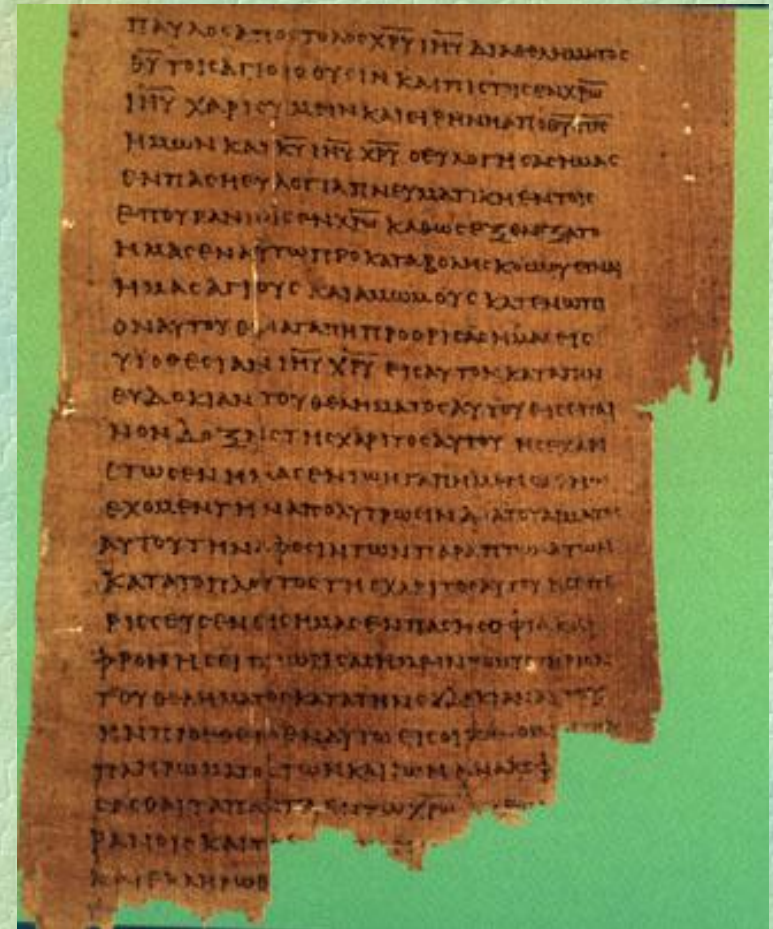


“Once the letter-writing conventions which Paul used are understood, the alert reader will also find clues to Paul's intent in his creative use of those conventions as well.”

Calvin J. Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul. Conversations in Context* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975, 1982) 30.

Form of Paul's Letters

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



THE LETTER OPENING

1. The Sender
2. The Recipient
3. The Opening Greeting

1. The Sender

A. Its Form

Consists of 4 Formal Elements:

i) *Name*

- always “Paul”
- occurs first in keeping with practice of ancient Greek letters
- only in letters of petition, when writing to someone in a position of authority did the recipient’s name come first
- thus Paul clearly does not write to his readers as an inferior

ii) *Title*

- two titles commonly used:

- “apostle”: all but 4 letters: so Rom; 1 Cor; 2 Cor; Gal; Eph; Col; 1 Tim; 2 Tim; Tit (plus also “servant”)
- “servant”: so Phil; Rom (both); Tit (plus also “apostle”)

iii) *Short Descriptive Phrase, indicating source of apostleship*

- “of Christ Jesus”: 1 Cor; 2 Cor; Phil; Phlm; Gal; Rom
- sometimes a qualifying prepositional phrase is added: “through the will of God”; 1 Cor; 2 Cor; Eph; Col; 2 Tim)

iv) *Co-sender*

- Paul normally includes the name of others with him
- however, this name is typically given last (after the full description of Paul's name, title and source) and is identified as "brother" in distinction from Paul who normally identifies himself with a more authoritative title (but see Phil 1:1)
- in secular letters co-senders occur sometimes in business or official letters but rarely in personal or familial letters
- function of including co-senders is not clear
- Luther Stirewalt Jr. proposes that it has an *authenticating* function, somewhat similar to the requirement in Jewish and Christian communities for at least two people to serve as witnesses to an event

Summary:

The form of a typical “sender” formula in Paul’s letters is:

- i) Name: “Paul”
- ii) Title: “an apostle (servant)”
- iii) Source: “of Christ Jesus (by the will of God)”
- iv) Co-sender: “and Timothy our brother”

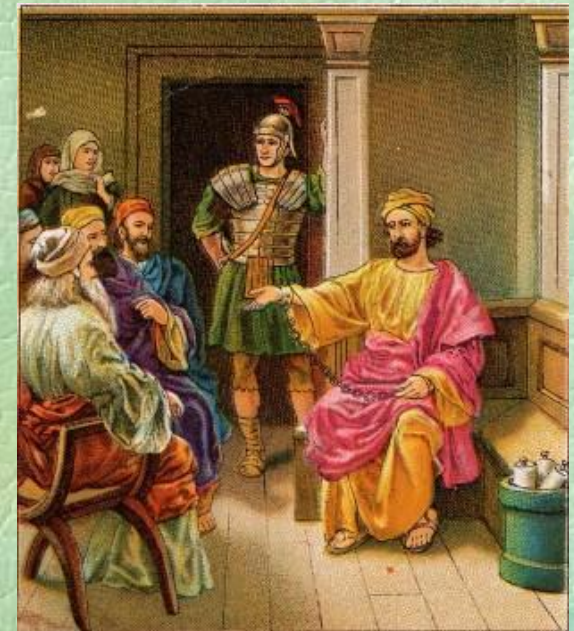
1. The Sender

B. Its Significance in Philemon

Text: “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother”

Unique formal feature:

- use of the title “*prisoner*” to identify himself
- every other letter Paul uses the title “apostle” and/or “servant”; this is only place where “prisoner” is used



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**PAUL, A PRISONER
(IN ROME)**

Acts 28:11-31.

GOLDEN TEXT:—I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

Rom. 1:16.

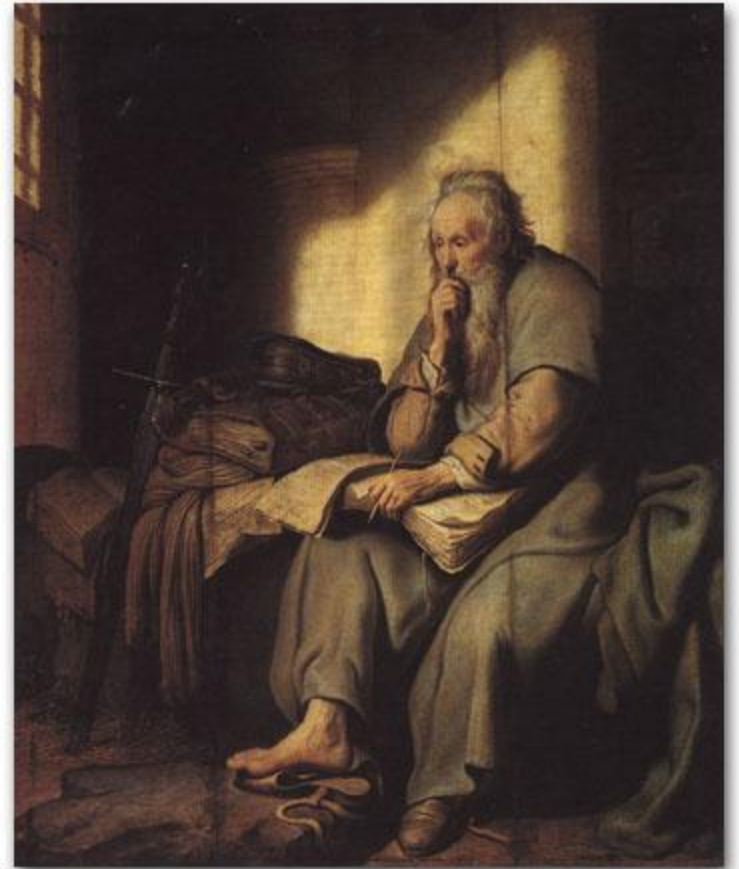
What does Paul do in the letter opening?

- Paul changes expected title of “apostle” to that of “prisoner”
- reason for change is not merely due to fact that Paul is now a prisoner; for he was also a prisoner while writing Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy, and the title “prisoner” is not used in any of these letters
- reason apparently lies in the historical context and primary request of the letter: Paul’s imprisonment and request to forgive Onesimus and return him to Paul to help the apostle during in prison ministry

- v 1: Paul, a *prisoner* of Christ Jesus”
- v 9: Paul writes that he is currently a *prisoner* of Jesus Christ (“I, Paul, ... now a prisoner of Jesus Christ”)
- v 10: Onesimus was converted by Paul while he was in *prison* (“whose father I have become in prison”)
- v 13: Paul hopes to keep Onesimus so that he may continue to help Paul while he is in *prison* (“in order that he might serve me on your behalf in my imprisonment for the gospel”)
- v 23: reference to Epaphras, “my fellow *prisoner*”

Conclusion:

- Paul deliberately changes title from expected “apostle” to rare “prisoner” not just to evoke sympathy for his condition but to foreshadow the setting and implicit request of the letter—that is, for Philemon to send Onesimus back to help Paul in his ministry from prison (vv 13, 20)



The Apostle Paul in Prison.
Rembrandt (c.1627).
Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart

2. The Recipient

A. Its Form

Consists of Two Formal Elements:

i) *Designation of Recipient*

- typically “church” + name/region where the church is located
- few letters have “to all the saints”

ii) *Positive Descriptive Phrase*

- Paul's letters typically add a short descriptive phrase that positively describes the readers' relationship to God and/or Jesus
- "in God (our) Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1)
- "in Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:1; Col 1:2)
- "loved of God, called to be holy" (Rom 1:7)

2. The Recipient

B. Its Significance in Philemon

Text:

“^{1b}To Philemon, our beloved friend and fellow worker, ²and to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church that meets at your house”

Unique Formal Features:

- (1) “beloved friend”: term “beloved” (ajgaphtov~) is key term in letter

(1) “beloved friend”: term “*beloved*” (ajgaphtov~)
is key term in letter

Deposit of praise #1: v 1b “*beloved*”

Deposit of praise #2: v 5b “your *love* for all
the saints”

Deposit of praise #3: v 7 “Your *love*...”

Withdrawal: v 9 “I appeal to you more because
of *love*”

Key request: v 16 “no longer as a slave, but
better than a slave, as a
beloved brother”



(2) Other recipients:

- Paul includes a number of other people as recipients
- modern analogy: “cc:” at bottom of letter
- in this way Paul not so subtly lets Philemon know that this request is not simply a private matter between the two of them; rather it is a *public* matter in which other people will be aware of the situation and expect resolution of the problem
- request made in public is harder to reject than one made in private (see also opening co-sender & closing greetings)

3. The Opening Greeting

A. Its Form

Consists of Three Elements:

i) *Greeting/Wish*

- “Grace and peace”
- Greek letters of that day typically opened with the word *caivrein* = literally “rejoice” but colloquially “greeting”
- Paul apparently “christianizes” the secular Greek greeting of *caivrein* into the Christian greeting *cavri-* (“grace”)
- “peace” is taken from the typical Jewish greeting *shalom*, used not only in speech but found also in Semitic letters
- thus Paul seems to be incorporating in a unique way a typically Greek greeting and a typically Jewish greeting

ii) *Recipient*

- “to you”

iii) *Divine Source*

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

3. The Opening Greeting

B. Its Significance in Philemon

Text: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”

Unique Formal Features:

- None in the opening greeting of Philemon.
- See Galatians 1:3-5 where Paul has added phrases that highlight Christ’s redemptive work as a pre-emptive strike against a Judaizing theology that undermines the sufficiency of Christ’s work of salvation)

Form of Paul's Letters

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



The Thanksgiving Section

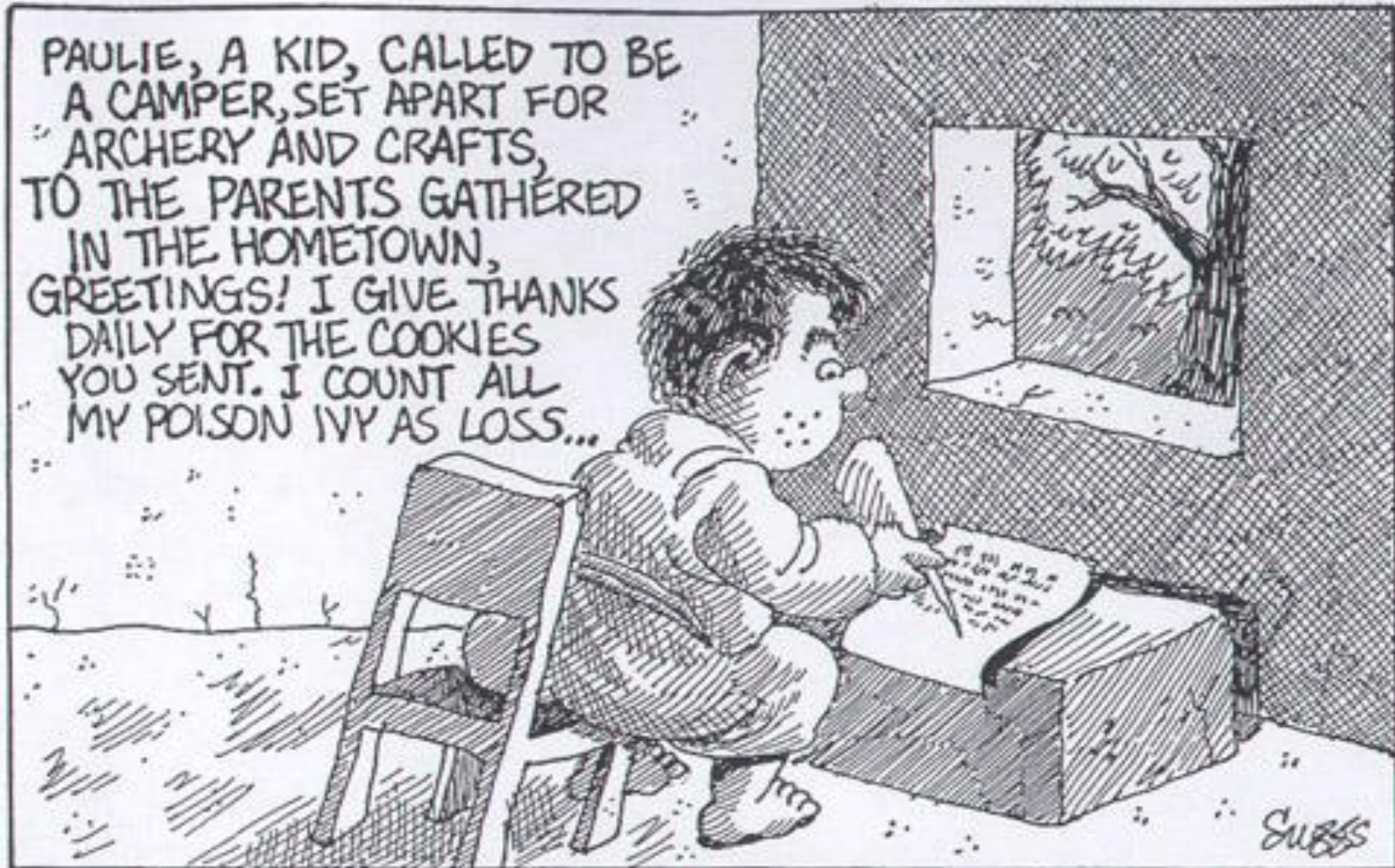
1. Introduction

Q: What is a thanksgiving section?

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

↔ the name “thanksgiving section” is derived from
(1) the opening formula “I/we give thanks...” and
(2) the content of this epistolary unit

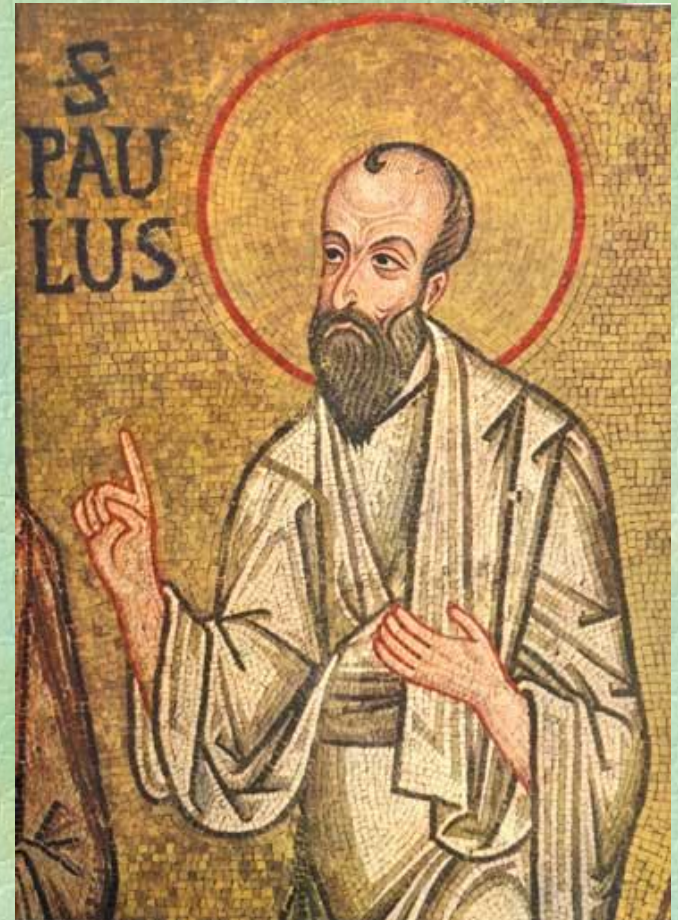
PAULIE, A KID, CALLED TO BE
A CAMPER, SET APART FOR
ARCHERY AND CRAFTS,
TO THE PARENTS GATHERED
IN THE HOMETOWN,
GREETINGS! I GIVE THANKS
DAILY FOR THE COOKIES
YOU SENT. I COUNT ALL
MY POISON IVY AS LOSS...



YOUNG PAUL WRITES AN EPISTLE FROM CAMP

2. The Function of the Thanksgiving Section

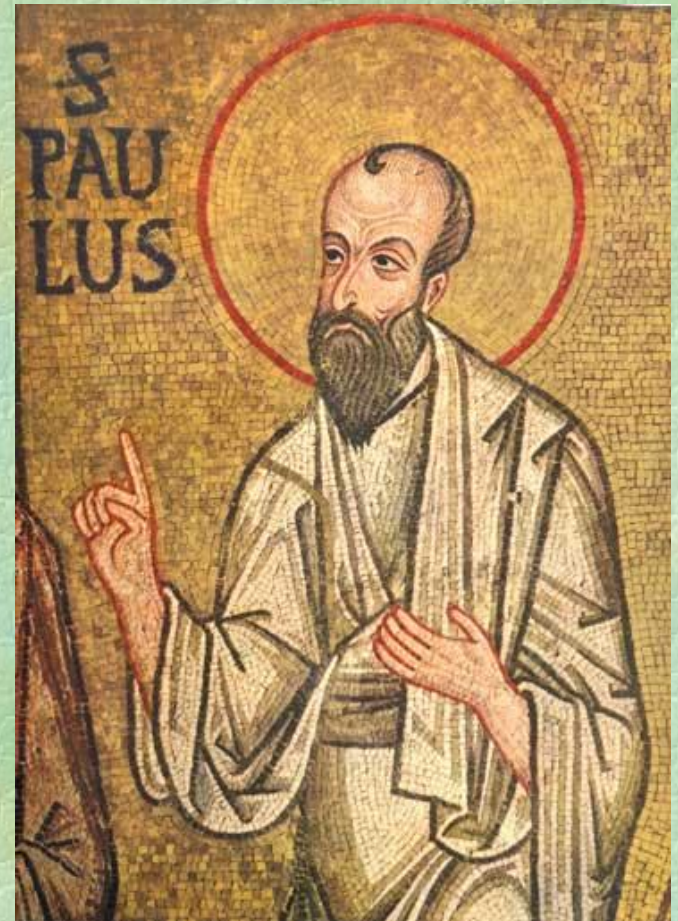
- a. *Pastoral Function*: The thanksgiving re-establishes Paul's relationship with his readers by means of a positive expression of gratitude to God for their work, growth, and faith. This is important if Paul wants his letters to be accepted and obeyed by his readers. The thanksgivings also reveal Paul's deep pastoral concern for his readers, as evidenced in the fact that he regularly prays for them.



Paul the pastor prays for his readers

2. The Function of the Thanksgiving Section

b. *Exhortative Function*: The thanksgiving is “implicitly or explicitly parenetic” (Schubert, 26, 89; O'Brien, 141-144, 165, 262-3). In other words, even though Paul is expressing his thankfulness to God, there is an implicit (or explicit) challenge to the letter recipients to live up to this praise (persuasion through praise).

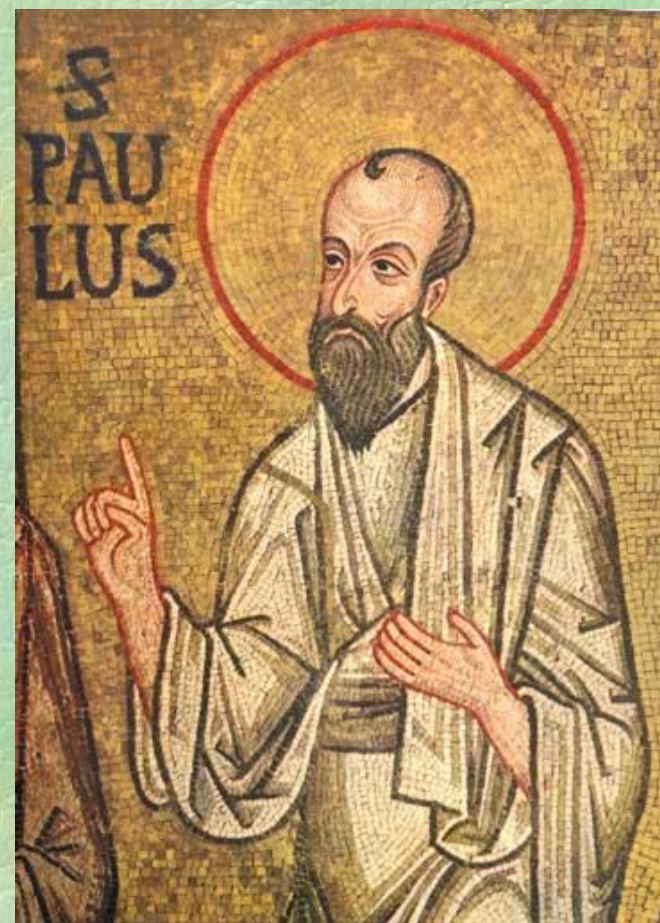


Paul the pastor exhorts his readers

2. The Function of the Thanksgiving Section

c. Foreshadowing Function: Most importantly, the thanksgiving foreshadows the central themes and issues to be developed in the body of the letter as well as the letter's style and character.

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Paul the letter writer foreshadows the main topics of his epistle for his readers

3. The Thanksgiving Section in Philemon (vv 4-7)

Text: “⁴I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. ⁶I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. ⁷Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.”

Significance:

a. *Exhortative (Parenetic) Function:* Paul’s thanksgiving for Philemon being the kind of person who demonstrates “love for all the saints” implicitly exhorts Philemon to keep acting this way toward fellow Christians--including his runaway slave Onesimus, whom Paul has not yet mentioned

b. *Foreshadowing Function*:

(1) Theme of “love”

- v 5b: “hearing of your *love*”
- v 7: “For I have much joy and comfort because of your *love*”
- both occurrences highlight love that Philemon demonstrates not so much to God and/or Christ but towards other Christians: “your love...which you have...for all the saints” (v 5b); his love results in the “hearts of the saints” being refreshed (v 7b)
- these deposits of praise add to the identification of Philemon in letter opening as one who is “beloved” (v 1b)
- foreshadows appeal of v 9: “because of *love* more I appeal” (note word order which emphasizes “love”)
- foreshadows request of v 16: “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a *beloved* brother”

b. *Foreshadowing Function (cont):*

(2) Theme of “refreshing the heart(s)”

- verb *ajnapauvw* here with Paul does not have its common meaning of “rest” but the distinctive sense of “refresh”
- noun *splavcna* (“inward parts, entrails”) a rarer and more emotive term than *kardiva* (“heart”)
- v 7b: “the *hearts* of the saints have been *refreshed* through you”
- foreshadows description of slave Onesimus in v 12 as “this one is my very *heart*”
- echoed by closing command in v 20b “*Refresh my heart*”

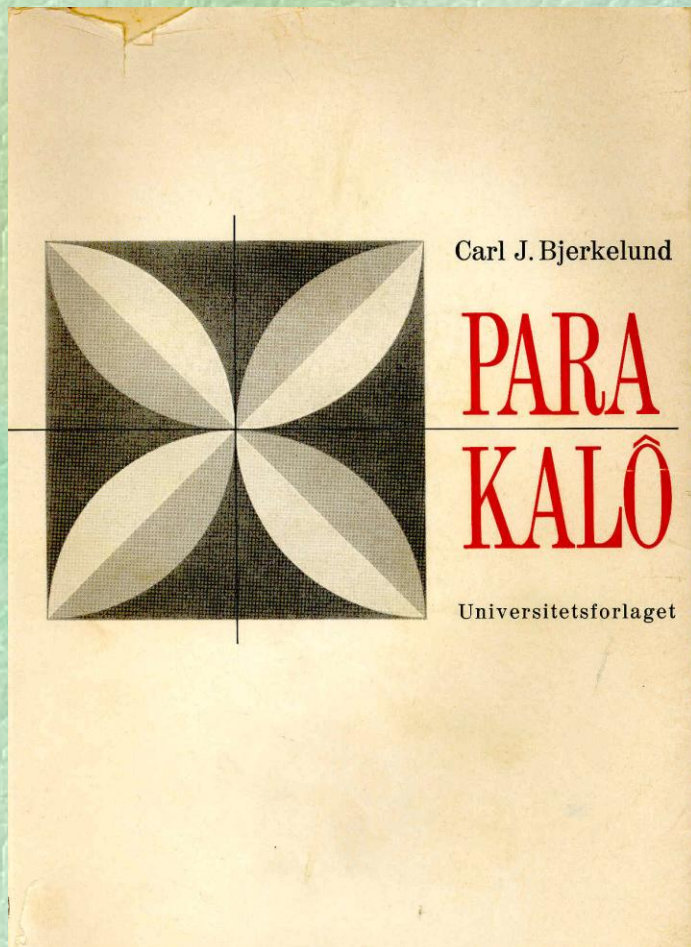
Form of Paul's Letters

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THE LETTER BODY

1. The “Appeal” Formula



Carl J. Bjerkelund, *Parakalô: Form, Funktion und Sinn der parakalô-Sätze in den paulinischen Briefen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967).

A. **Form:** Four basic elements

Example: *Romans 12:1*

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”

1. The verb: “I appeal”
2. The recipients: “to you, brothers”
3. Prepositional phrase: “by the mercies of God”
4. The content of the appeal: “that you present ...”

Other examples: Rom 15:30; 16:17; 1 Cor 1:10; 4:16; 16:15-16; 2 Cor 2:8; 10:1-2; Phil 4:2; 1 Thess 4:1, 10b-12; 5:14; 2 Thess 3:14; Eph 4:1

B. Function

- Primary function:
- to indicate a major transition in the text
- formula marks transition either from the end of the thanksgiving to the beginning of letter body (1 Cor 1:10; Phlm 8-9) or, as more typically happens, a transition within the body of letter (Rom 12:1; 15:30; 16:7; 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 10:1; Phil 4:2; 1 Thess 4:1; Eph 4:1)



**New
Paragraph
Sign**

B. Function

- Secondary function:
- the appeal formula was used in official correspondence when writer had a good relationship with recipients and confidently expected them to do contents of letter
- Appeal formula thus expresses a *more friendly, less heavy-handed tone*
- Paul deliberately uses the appeal formula in this nuanced manner, where his authority is not in question and he can make a request rather than a command in the confidence that his appeal will be obeyed



DO IT OR ELSE!

C. Appeal Formula in Philemon

“Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and command you to do what you ought to do, more because of love I *appeal*—I, Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—I *appeal* to you concerning my child, to whom I gave birth in prison, Onesimus...” (vv 8-10)

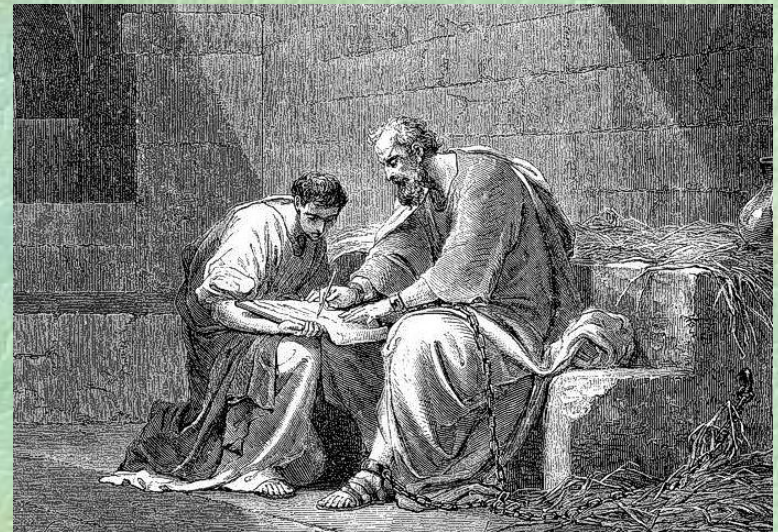
Despite the more user-friendly appeal formula (used twice), Paul still implies his authority over Philemon:

- v 8: “although in Christ I could be bold and *command* you to do what you *ought to do*...”
- note also later references in the letter:
 - v 14: “...in order that your good work might not be *by necessity* but by your free will”
 - v 21: “Confident of your *obedience* ...”

2. Other (Non-Epistolary) Persuasive Techniques in the Letter Body

A. Pathos Appeal (v 9)

- “being such a person as Paul, but now an *old man* and prisoner of Christ Jesus”
- Paul’s reference to himself as an old man may be intended to evoke sympathy
- Paul more likely is using his old age to evoke respect and obedience
- Lev 19:32 “Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly”
- Sirach 8:6 “Insult no man when he is old”



Paul writes from prison

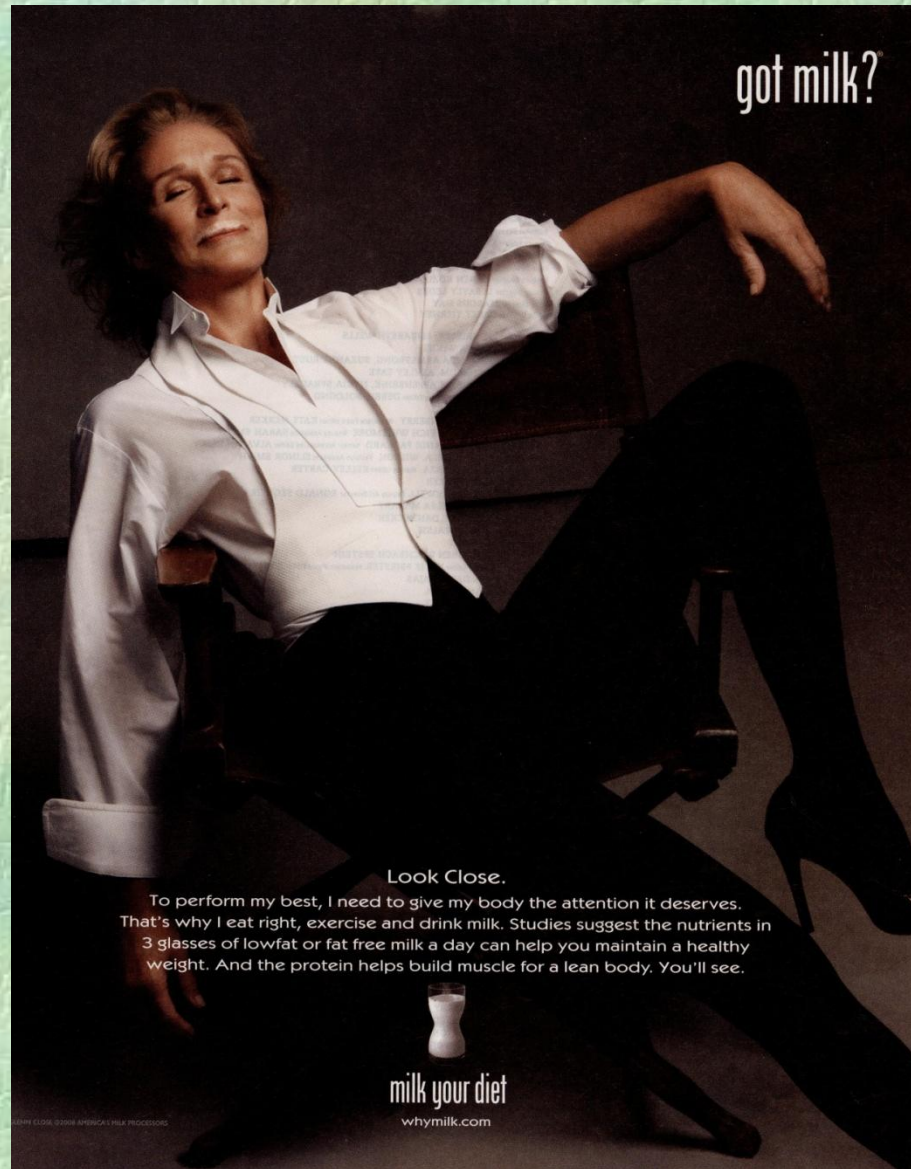
B. Pun on Onesimus' Name (v 11)

- text: *“Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me”*
- Pun draws attention to the change in status from Onesimus' previous value (“useless”) to his current value (“useful”)
- Paul thus minimizes not only the financial loss that Philemon experienced by Onesimus' absence (thereby making it easier to forgive him: explicit request) but also makes it less costly for the owner to send his slave back to Paul to help the apostle in his prison ministry (implicit request)



Onesimus = “useful”

B. Pun on Onesimus' Name (v 11)



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milk your diet
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C. Use of “Divine Passive” (v 15)

- text: “he was separated (ejcwrivsqh) from you”
- Paul employs the “divine passive,” i.e., God is the unspoken agent, to reframe the situation as being part of God’s providential plan
- Gen 50:20 “You intended to harm to me, but God intended it for good”
- Rom 8:28 “We know that God works all things for the good of those who love him”

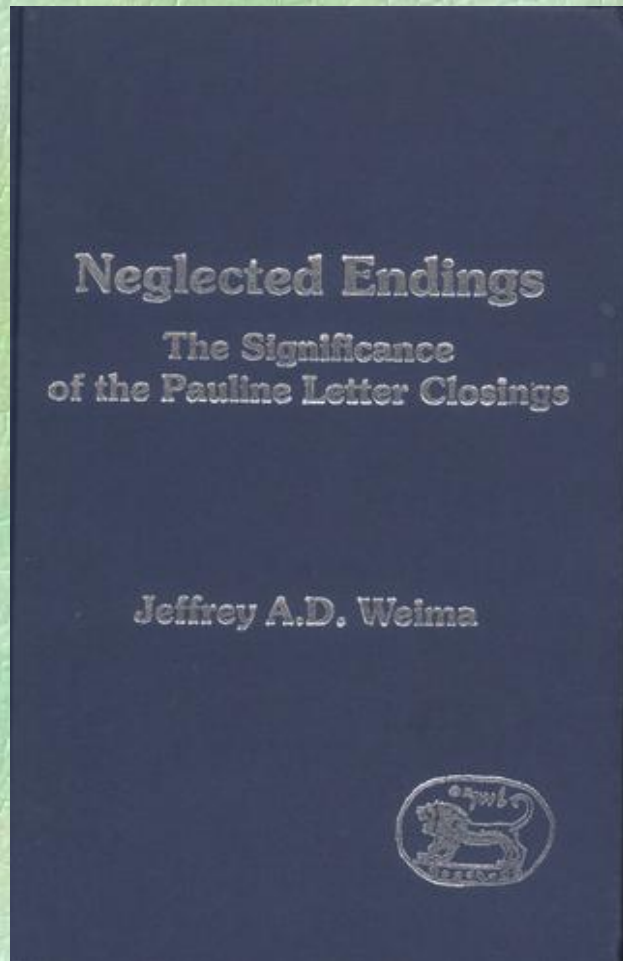


Form of Paul's Letters

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IV. The Letter Closing

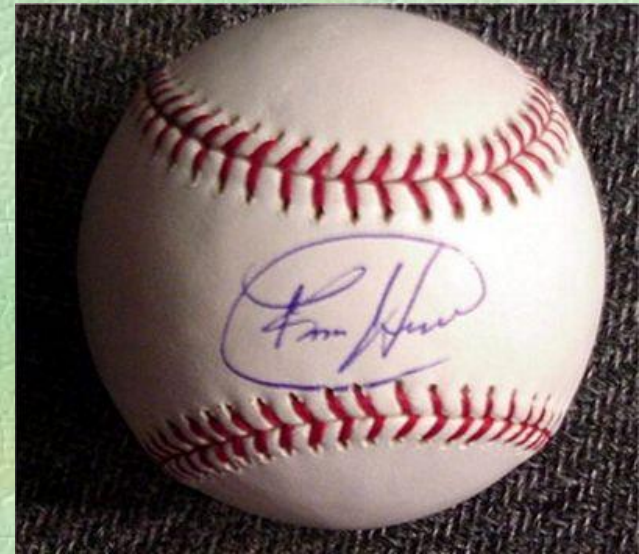


Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Neglected Endings. The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings* (JSNT Supplement Series 101; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994).

1. The Autograph

A. Form

- term: “self” = *autos*; “writing” = *graphe*
- thus refers to Paul writing himself rather than through a secretary/amanuensis
- not common in secular letters to refer explicitly to change of handwriting, because reader could easily see this; however, this is not possible for Paul’s letters which were read publicly in context of worship
- Rom 16:22: explicit reference to the secretary Tertius
- 5x: “in my own hand”: 1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; 2 Thess 3:17; Phlm 19; Col 4:18a



B. Function

- autograph was a fixed literary custom of Greco-Roman letters to indicate commitment of author to its contents
- Paul somewhat similarly uses the autograph to add emphasis to the content of his letters:
- *Gal 6:11* “See with what large letters I write to you in my own hand”
- *2 Thess 3:17* “I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters”
- *1 Cor 16:21* “I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand”

C. Autograph in Philemon (v 19)

- *text*: “I am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self”
- *function*: the autograph, with its promise of payment, echoes in an official or legally binding manner Paul’s promise of the previous verse (v 18) to reimburse Philemon for any debts he may have as a result of Onesimus’ flight
- legal function of autograph confirmed by use of verb *ajpotivnw* commonly found in papyri as legal, technical term meaning “make compensation, pay the damages”
- additionally Paul’s presence (and thus his authority) is made more direct by means of writing in his own hand

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C. Autograph in Philemon (v 19)--continued

- parenthetical comment of v 19b: “—not to mention that you owe me your very self”
- *paraleipsis*: a rhetorical device that allows a speaker or writer to address a subject that they outwardly claim does not need to be addressed
- this rhetorical device “is here used to transform Philemon’s position from creditor to debtor and so to put him under a limitless moral obligation to comply with Paul’s requests” (J. M. Barclay, “Paul, Philemon and the Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership,” *NTS* 37 [1991] 172; also Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, 74-78)

2. The Hortatory Section

A. Form

- every closing has some final command(s) or exhortation(s)
- this material is the least formally structured of all the closing conventions
- however frequently introduced by:
 - (1) “finally”: 2 Cor 13:11; Gal 6:17; Phil 4:8)
 - (2) “brothers: Rom 16:17; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:8; 1 Thess 5:25; Phlm 20

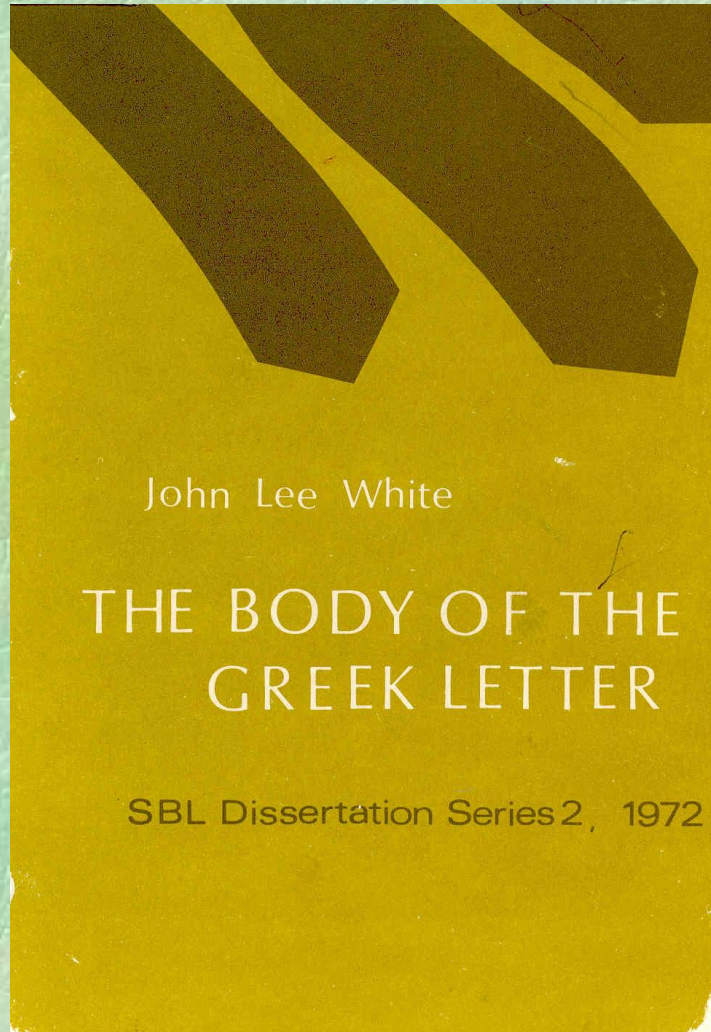
B. Function

- Paul wants to issue final exhortation(s) to his readers

C. Significance in Philemon (v 20)

- text: “Yes, brother, I do wish that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ”
- v 20a: pun on Onisemus’ name: verb “benefit” in Greek is from the same root as Onisemus’ name: literally, “may I have some ‘*Onisemus*’ from you”
- v 20b: command to “refresh my heart” echoes his earlier description of Philemon as one who has “refreshed the hearts of the saints” (v 7b) and his description of Onesimus as one “who is my very heart” (v 12b)

3. The Confidence Formula



A. John White, *The Body of the Letter* (Missoula: Scholars, 1972)
104-106

-proposed 4 standard elements:

- (1) Emphatic use of first person pronoun “I” (ejgwv)
- (2) Perfect form of verb expressing confidence (pevpoiqa)
- (3) Reason(s) why speaker is confident
- (4) Content of what speaker is confident about

B. Function

- formula exerts pressure on letter recipients to live up to the confidence that the speaker has in them
- Stanley Olsen: “The evidence of a variety of parallels suggest that such expressions [of confidence] are usually included to serve the persuasive purpose. Whatever the emotion behind the expression, the function is to undergird the letter’s requests or admonitions by creating a sense of obligation through praise” (“Pauline Expressions of Confidence in His Addressees, *CBQ* 47 [1985] 289)

C. Significance in Philemon (v 21)

- text: “Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask”
- Paul uses the confidence formula here in a positive fashion to exert further pressure on Philemon by praising him in advance for his expected obedience
- Stanley Olsen: “In Phlm 21 the confident of compliance functions to reinforce the appeal of the whole letter”
- confidence formula also recalls earlier material in the letter by claiming that Philemon “will do even more than I ask”

4. The Apostolic Parousia

CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND
INTERPRETATION:
STUDIES PRESENTED TO
JOHN KNOX

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CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1967

Robert W. Funk, “The Apostolic *Parousia*: Form and Significance,” in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 249-268.

4. The Apostolic Parousia

A. Form

- refers to a section of the letter where Paul attempts to make his presence more powerfully felt
- does this by three possible means: Paul refers to:
 - (1) his future visit
 - (2) the future visit of his emissary
 - (3) the act of letter writing

B. Function

- Robert Funk: “All of these [three means] are media by which Paul makes his *apostolic authority* effective in the churches. The underlying theme is therefore the apostolic parousia—the presence of apostolic authority and power” (“Apostolic Parousia,” 249)

C. Significance in Philemon (v 22)

- text: “And one more thing: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers”
- this is hardly a “throwaway remark” given “in the more relaxed mood of the conclusion” (Dunn, *Colossians and Philemon*, 347, 345)
- it is instead an indirect threat: Paul will be coming and so able to see whether Philemon has obeyed his request!

5. The Greetings

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T. Y. Mullins, "Greeting as a New Testament Form," *JBL* 88 (1968) 418-426

5. The Greetings

A. Form

- the closing greetings are not to be confused with the opening greeting: “Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ”
- all closing greetings use verb “I greet” as in secular letters
- can divide up greetings according to subject of the verb:
 - (1) First-Person Type: “I greet...”; only in Rom 16:22 with greeting of the amanuensis, Tertius
 - (2) Second-Person Type: “Greet...!”; a command from Paul that his readers greet others on Paul's behalf
 - (3) Third-Person Type: “So-and-so greets you”; Paul passes on greetings of some 3rd party with him to his readers

B. Function

- to maintain or even establish Paul's relationship with the readers

C. Significance in Philemon (vv 23-24)

- text: "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, send you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers"
- mention of five people in closing greetings again (see co-sender and multiple recipients) makes the request of the letter a public matter and so exerts further pressure on Philemon
- modern analogy: "cc:" at bottom of letter
- mention of Epaphras first and his title is significant