

Grasping God's Word

New Testament Letters

New Testament Letters

Paul	?	James	Peter	John	Jude
Romans	Hebrews	James	1 Peter	1 John	Jude
1 Corinthians			2 Peter	2 John	
2 Corinthians				3 John	
Galatians					
Ephesians					
Philippians					
Colossians					
1 Thessalonians					
2 Thessalonians					
1 Timothy					
2 Timothy					
Titus					
Philemon					

New Testament Letters

- New Testament letters are typically longer than their ancient counterparts.
- Within the New Testament we find informal, personal letters, such as Philemon, 2 John, and 3 John, as well as formal letters, such as Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews, James, and 1 Peter.

New Testament Letters

- Paul, Peter, and John write as more than just friends and acquaintances offering personal advice. They write as apostles (i.e., as witnesses of the resurrected Christ). Their letters of instruction, warning, and encouragement carry authority because they write as Christ's authentic representatives.
- New Testament letters are occasional or situational. This means that they were written to address specific situations or problems related to the author or (usually) to the readers.

New Testament Letters

- They wrote to clarify an issue (e.g., Thessalonians), to address a doctrinal problem (e.g., Colossians), or to confront the readers about their behavior (e.g., James). The topics covered in a letter were usually dictated by the specific situations at work within the community to which the apostles wrote.

New Testament Letters

- Rather than writing systematic theologies, the authors used their letters to apply theology in practical ways to specific situations in churches.
- We always want to be careful not to conclude too much from one letter, and bring together teachings from different letters as we live for Christ today.

New Testament Letters

- The actual job of writing down a letter was normally assigned to a trained scribe or secretary. At the end of a letter, it was customary for the author to "pick up the pen" and add a final greeting in his own handwriting.
- Romans 16:22
I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.

New Testament Letters

- 1 Corinthians 16:21

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.

- Colossians 4:18

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

- 2 Thessalonians 3:17

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write.

New Testament Letters

- Along with secretaries, co-senders played an important part in New Testament letters.
- 1 Thessalonians 1:1

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

New Testament Letters

- Philippians 1:1-2

¹ Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

New Testament Letters

- After a finished copy of the letter had been prepared, it was delivered. Paul used trusted friends such as Tychicus to carry his letters.

New Testament Letters

- Ephesians 6:21-22

²¹ But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. ²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.

New Testament Letters

- Colossians 4:7-9

⁷ As to all my affairs, Tychicus, *our* beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸ *For* I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about *our* circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹ and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your *number*. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

New Testament Letters

- New Testament letters were meant to be read aloud again and again to specific congregations.

- Colossians 4:16

When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.

New Testament Letters

- 1 Thessalonians 5:27

I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.

- 2 Thessalonians 2:15

So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

Structure of Letters

Date

Name of addressee

Street address

City, state, zip code

Greeting,

Body of letter

Closing,

Signature

Structure of Letters

- Introduction: the name of the writer, the name of the recipients, a greeting, and an introductory prayer

Structure of Letters

- Galatians 1:1-2

¹ Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), ² and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia...

- James 1:1

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations...

Structure of Letters

- 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

⁴ I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, ⁵ that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, ⁶ even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Structure of Letters

- Body: where the author addresses specific situations facing the church community, including instruction, persuasion, rebuke, and exhortation.
- Conclusion: a number of different elements depending on the situation (e.g., travel plans, prayer requests, greetings, final instructions, holy kiss, autograph, benediction, commendation of coworkers, doxology)

Structure of Letters

- Hebrews 12:1-2

¹ Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Structure of Letters

- Step 1: What did the passage mean to the original audience?
- Step 2: What are the differences between the biblical audience and us?
- Step 3: What are the theological principles in this text?
- Step 4: How does this fit with the rest of the Bible?
- Step 5: How should we live this out today?