

TYNDALE



CORNERSTONE

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Ephesians

Harold W. Hoehner

Philippians, 1-2 Thessalonians

Philip W. Comfort

Colossians, Philemon

Peter H. Davids

GENERAL EDITOR

Philip W. Comfort

WITH THE ENTIRE TEXT OF THE
 New Living
Translation

CORNERSTONE
B I B L I C A L
COMMENTARY

General Editor

Philip W. Comfort

D. Litt. et Phil., University of South Africa;

Tyndale House Publishers;

Coastal Carolina University.

Consulting Editor, Old Testament

Tremper Longman III

PhD, Yale University;

Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies, Westmont College.

Consulting Editor, New Testament

Grant Osborne

PhD, University of Aberdeen;

Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Associate Editors

Jason Driesbach

MA, Biblical Exegesis and Linguistics, Dallas Theological Seminary;

Tyndale House Publishers.

Mark R. Norton

MA, Theological Studies, Wheaton Graduate School;

Tyndale House Publishers.

James A. Swanson

MSM, Multnomah Biblical Seminary;

MTh, University of South Africa;

Tyndale House Publishers.



CORNERSTONE BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

Ephesians

Harold W. Hoehner

Philippians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Philip W. Comfort

Colossians, Philemon

Peter H. Davids

GENERAL EDITOR

Philip W. Comfort

featuring the text of the
NEW LIVING TRANSLATION



TYNDALE HOUSE PUBLISHERS, INC. CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Volume 16

Visit Tyndale's exciting Web site at www.tyndale.com

Ephesians copyright © 2008 by Harold W. Hoehner. All rights reserved.

Philippians and *1 & 2 Thessalonians* copyright © 2008 by Philip W. Comfort. All rights reserved.

Colossians and *Philemon* copyright © 2008 by Peter H. Davids. All rights reserved.

Designed by Luke Daab and Timothy R. Botts.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

TYNDALE, *New Living Translation*, *NLT*, Tyndale's quill logo, and the New Living Translation logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cornerstone biblical commentary.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8423-8344-8 (hc : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8423-8344-1 (hc : alk. paper)

1. Bible—Commentaries. I. Comfort, Philip W. II. Davids, Peter.

III. Hoehner, Harold W.

BS491.3.C67 2006

220.7~~7~~—dc22

2005026928

Printed in the United States of America

14 13 12 11 10 09 08

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

C O N T E N T S

Contributors to Volume 16

vi

General Editor's Preface

vii

Abbreviations

ix

Transliteration and Numbering System

xiii

EPHESIANS

1

PHILIPPIANS

139

COLOSSIANS

227

1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

313

PHILEMON

415

CONTRIBUTORS TO VOLUME 16

Ephesians: Harold W. Hoehner

BA, Barrington College;

ThM, Dallas Theological Seminary;

ThD, Dallas Theological Seminary;

PhD, Cambridge University;

Postdoctoral study at Tübingen University and Cambridge University;

Distinguished Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Philippians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians: Philip W. Comfort

BA, Cleveland State University;

MA, The Ohio State University;

D. Litt. et Phil., University of South Africa;

Tyndale House Publishers;

Coastal Carolina University

Colossians, Philemon: Peter H. Davids

BA, Wheaton College;

MDiv, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School;

PhD, Manchester University;

Professor of Biblical Theology, St. Stephen's University

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* is based on the second edition of the New Living Translation (2004). Nearly 100 scholars from various church backgrounds and from several countries (United States, Canada, England, and Australia) participated in the creation of the NLT. Many of these same scholars are contributors to this commentary series. All the commentators, whether participants in the NLT or not, believe that the Bible is God's inspired word and have a desire to make God's word clear and accessible to his people.

This Bible commentary is the natural extension of our vision for the New Living Translation, which we believe is both exegetically accurate and idiomatically powerful. The NLT attempts to communicate God's inspired word in a lucid English translation of the original languages so that English readers can understand and appreciate the thought of the original writers. In the same way, the *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* aims at helping teachers, pastors, students, and laypeople understand every thought contained in the Bible. As such, the commentary focuses first on the words of Scripture, then on the theological truths of Scripture—inasmuch as the words express the truths.

The commentary itself has been structured in such a way as to help readers get at the meaning of Scripture, passage by passage, through the entire Bible. Each Bible book is prefaced by a substantial book introduction that gives general historical background important for understanding. Then the reader is taken through the Bible text, passage by passage, starting with the New Living Translation text printed in full. This is followed by a section called "Notes," wherein the commentator helps the reader understand the Hebrew or Greek behind the English of the NLT, interacts with other scholars on important interpretive issues, and points the reader to significant textual and contextual matters. The "Notes" are followed by the "Commentary," wherein each scholar presents a lucid interpretation of the passage, giving special attention to context and major theological themes.

The commentators represent a wide spectrum of theological positions within the evangelical community. We believe this is good because it reflects the rich variety in Christ's church. All the commentators uphold the authority of God's word and believe it is essential to heed the old adage: "Wholly apply yourself to the Scriptures and apply them wholly to you." May this commentary help you know the truths of Scripture, and may this knowledge help you "grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord" (2 Pet 1:2, NLT).

PHILIP W. COMFORT
GENERAL EDITOR

A B B R E V I A T I O N S

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

b.	Babylonian Gemara	Heb.	Hebrew	NT	New Testament
bar.	baraita	ibid.	<i>ibidem</i> , in the same place	OL	Old Latin
c.	<i>circa</i> , around, approximately	i.e.	<i>id est</i> , the same	OS	Old Syriac
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare	in loc.	<i>in loco</i> , in the place cited	OT	Old Testament
ch, chs	chapter, chapters	lit.	literally	p., pp.	page, pages
contra	in contrast to	LXX	Septuagint	pl.	plural
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls	Ⲛ	Majority Text	Q	Quelle ("Sayings" as Gospel source)
ed.	edition, editor	m.	Mishnah	rev.	revision
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	masc.	masculine	sg.	singular
et al.	<i>et alli</i> , and others	mg	margin	t.	Tosefta
fem.	feminine	ms	manuscript	TR	Textus Receptus
ff	following (verses, pages)	mss	manuscripts	v., vv.	verse, verses
fl.	flourished	MT	Masoretic Text	vid.	<i>videur</i> , it seems
Gr.	Greek	n.d.	no date	viz.	<i>videlicet</i> , namely
		neut.	neuter	vol.	volume
		no.	number	γ.	Jerusalem Gemara

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

ASV	American Standard Version	NCV	New Century Version	NKJV	New King James Version
CEV	Contemporary English Version	NEB	New English Bible	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
ESV	English Standard Version	NET	The NET Bible	NLT	New Living Translation
GW	God's Word	NIV	New International Version	REB	Revised English Bible
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible	NIrV	New International Reader's Version	RSV	Revised Standard Version
JB	Jerusalem Bible	NJB	New Jerusalem Bible	TEV	Today's English Version
KJV	King James Version	NJPS	The New Jewish Publication Society Translation	TLB	The Living Bible
NAB	New American Bible				
NASB	New American Standard Bible				

ABBREVIATIONS FOR DICTIONARIES, LEXICONS, COLLECTIONS OF TEXTS, ORIGINAL LANGUAGE EDITIONS

ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (6 vols., Freedman) [1992]	BAGD	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 2nd ed. (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker) [1979]	BDB	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Brown, Driver, Briggs) [1907]
ANEP	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> (Pritchard) [1965]	BDAG	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3rd ed. (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich) [2000]	BDF	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Blass, Debrunner, Funk) [1961]
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Pritchard) [1969]				

- BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger and Rudolph) [1983]
- CAD *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* [1956]
- COS *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols., Hallo and Younger) [1997–2002]
- DBI *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman) [1998]
- DBT *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (2nd ed., Leon-Dufour) [1972]
- DCH *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (5 vols., D. Clines) [2000]
- DJD *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* [1955–]
- DJG *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Green, McKnight, Marshall) [1992]
- DOTP *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (T. Alexander, D.W. Baker) [2003]
- DPL *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Hawthorne, Martin, Reid) [1993]
- EDNT *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (3 vols., H. Balz, G. Schneider. ET) [1990–1993]
- HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, J. Stamm; trans. M. Richardson) [1994–1999]
- IBD *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (3 vols., Douglas, Wiseman) [1980]
- IDB *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols., Buttrick) [1962]
- ISBE *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols., Bromiley) [1979–1988]
- KBL *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros* (Koehler, Baumgartner) [1958]
- LCL Loeb Classical Library
- L&N *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (Louw and Nida) [1989]
- LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed., Liddell, Scott, Jones) [1996]
- MM *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (Moulton and Milligan) [1930; 1997]
- NA²⁶ *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1979]
- NA²⁷ *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th ed., Nestle-Aland) [1993]
- NBD *New Bible Dictionary* (2nd ed., Douglas, Hillyer) [1982]
- NIDB *New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Douglas, Tenney) [1987]
- NIDBA *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* (Blaiklock and Harrison) [1983]
- NIDNTT *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (4 vols., C. Brown) [1975–1985]
- NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols., W. A. VanGemeren) [1997]
- PGM *Papyri graecae magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*. (Preisendanz) [1928]
- PG *Patrologia Graecae* (J. P. Migne) [1857–1886]
- TBD *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Elwell, Comfort) [2001]
- TDNT *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (10 vols., Kittel, Friedrich; trans. Bromiley) [1964–1976]
- TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (8 vols., Botterweck, Ringgren; trans. Willis, Bromiley, Green) [1974–]
- TLNT *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (3 vols., C. Spicq) [1994]
- TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (3 vols., E. Jenni) [1997]
- TWOT *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (2 vols., Harris, Archer) [1980]
- UBS³ *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (3rd ed., Metzger et al.) [1975]
- UBS⁴ *United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (4th corrected ed., Metzger et al.) [1993]
- WH *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Westcott and Hort) [1882]

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis	1 Sam	1 Samuel	Esth	Esther
Exod	Exodus	2 Sam	2 Samuel	Job	Job
Lev	Leviticus	1 Kgs	1 Kings	Ps, Pss	Psalms, Psalms
Num	Numbers	2 Kgs	2 Kings	Prov	Proverbs
Deut	Deuteronomy	1 Chr	1 Chronicles	Ecll	Ecclesiastes
Josh	Joshua	2 Chr	2 Chronicles	Song	Song of Songs
Judg	Judges	Ezra	Ezra	Isa	Isaiah
Ruth	Ruth	Neh	Nehemiah	Jer	Jeremiah

Lam	Lamentations	Amos	Amos	Hab	Habakkuk
Ezek	Ezekiel	Obad	Obadiah	Zeph	Zephaniah
Dan	Daniel	Jonah	Jonah	Hag	Haggai
Hos	Hosea	Mic	Micah	Zech	Zechariah
Joel	Joel	Nah	Nahum	Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Matt	Matthew	Eph	Ephesians	Heb	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil	Philippians	Jas	James
Luke	Luke	Col	Colossians	1 Pet	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom	Romans	1 Tim	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	2 Tim	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal	Galatians	Phlm	Philemon	Rev	Revelation

Deuterocanonical

Bar	Baruch	1–2 Esdr	1–2 Esdras	Pr Man	Prayer of Manasseh
Add Dan	Additions to Daniel	Add Esth	Additions to Esther	Ps 151	Psalms 151
Pr Azar	Prayer of Azariah	Ep Jer	Epistle of Jeremiah	Sir	Sirach
Bel	Bel and the Dragon	Jdt	Judith	Tob	Tobit
Sg Three	Song of the Three Children	1–2 Macc	1–2 Maccabees	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Sus	Susanna	3–4 Macc	3–4 Maccabees		

MANUSCRIPTS AND LITERATURE FROM QUMRAN

Initial numerals followed by "Q" indicate particular caves at Qumran. For example, the notation 4Q267 indicates text 267 from cave 4 at Qumran. Further, 1QS 4:9-10 indicates column 4, lines 9-10 of the *Rule of the Community*; and 4Q166 1 ii 2 indicates fragment 1, column ii, line 2 of text 166 from cave 4. More examples of common abbreviations are listed below.

CD	Cairo Geniza copy of the <i>Damascus Document</i>	1QIsa ^b	Isaiah copy ^b	4QLam ^a	Lamentations
		1QM	<i>War Scroll</i>	11QPs ^a	Psalms
1QH	<i>Thanksgiving Hymns</i>	1QpHab	<i>Pesher Habakkuk</i>	11QTemple ^{a,b}	<i>Temple Scroll</i>
1QIsa ^a	Isaiah copy ^a	1QS	<i>Rule of the Community</i>	11Qtglob	<i>Targum of Job</i>

IMPORTANT NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

(all dates given are AD; ordinal numbers refer to centuries)

Significant Papyri (P = Papyrus)

P1 Matt 1; early 3rd	P20 James 2-3; 3rd	P39 John 8; first half of 3rd
P4+P64+P67 Matt 3, 5, 26; Luke 1-6; late 2nd	P22 John 15-16; mid 3rd	P40 Rom 1-4, 6, 9; 3rd
P5 John 1, 16, 20; early 3rd	P23 James 1; c. 200	P45 Gospels and Acts; early 3rd
P13 Heb 2-5, 10-12; early 3rd	P27 Rom 8-9; 3rd	P46 Paul's Major Epistles (less Pastorals); late 2nd
P15+P16 (probably part of same codex) 1 Cor 7-8, Phil 3-4; late 3rd	P30 1 Thess 4-5; 2 Thess 1; early 3rd	P47 Rev 9-17; 3rd
	P32 Titus 1-2; late 2nd	
	P37 Matt 26; late 3rd	

P49+P65 Eph 4-5; 1 Thess
 1-2; 3rd
 P52 John 18; c. 125
 P53 Matt 26, Acts 9-10;
 middle 3rd
 P66 John; late 2nd
 P70 Matt 2-3, 11-12, 24; 3rd
 P72 1-2 Peter, Jude; c. 300

P74 Acts, General Epistles; 7th
 P75 Luke and John; c. 200
 P77+P103 (probably part of
 same codex) Matt 13-14, 23;
 late 2nd
 P87 Phlm; late 2nd
 P90 John 18-19; late 2nd
 P91 Acts 2-3; 3rd

P92 Eph 1, 2 Thess 1; c. 300
 P98 Rev 1:13-20; late 2nd
 P100 James 3-5; c. 300
 P101 Matt 3-4; 3rd
 P104 Matt 21; 2nd
 P106 John 1; 3rd
 P115 Rev 2-3, 5-6, 8-15; 3rd

Significant Uncials

Ⲙ (Sinaiticus) most of NT; 4th
 A (Alexandrinus) most of NT;
 5th
 B (Vaticanus) most of NT; 4th
 C (Ephraemi Rescriptus) most
 of NT with many lacunae;
 5th
 D (Bezae) Gospels, Acts; 5th
 D (Claromontanus), Paul's
 Epistles; 6th (different MS
 than Bezae)
 E (Laudianus 35) Acts; 6th
 F (Augensis) Paul's Epistles; 9th
 G (Boernerianus) Paul's
 Epistles; 9th

H (Coislinianus) Paul's
 Epistles; 6th
 I (Freerianus or Washington)
 Paul's Epistles; 5th
 L (Regius) Gospels; 8th
 Q (Guelferbytanus B) Luke,
 John; 5th
 P (Porphyrrianus) Acts—
 Revelation; 9th
 T (Borgianus) Luke, John; 5th
 W (Washingtonianus or the
 Freer Gospels) Gospels; 5th
 Z (Dublinensis) Matthew; 6th
 037 (Δ; Sangallensis) Gospels;
 9th

038 (Θ; Koridethi) Gospels;
 9th
 040 (Ξ; Zacynthius) Luke; 6th
 043 (Φ; Beratinus) Matt,
 Mark; 6th
 044 (Ψ; Athous Laurae)
 Gospels, Acts, Paul's
 Epistles; 9th
 048 Acts, Paul's Epistles,
 General Epistles; 5th
 0171 Matt 10, Luke 22;
 c. 300
 0189 Acts 5; c. 200

Significant Minuscules

1 Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles;
 12th
 33 All NT except Rev; 9th
 81 Acts, Paul's Epistles,
 General Epistles; 1044
 565 Gospels; 9th
 700 Gospels; 11th

1424 (or Family 1424—a
 group of 29 manuscripts
 sharing nearly the same
 text) most of NT; 9th-10th
 1739 Acts, Paul's Epistles; 10th
 2053 Rev; 13th
 2344 Rev; 11th

f¹ (a family of manuscripts
 including 1, 118, 131, 209)
 Gospels; 12th-14th
 f¹³ (a family of manuscripts
 including 13, 69, 124, 174,
 230, 346, 543, 788, 826,
 828, 983, 1689, 1709—
 known as the Ferrar group)
 Gospels; 11th-15th

Significant Ancient Versions

SYRIAC (SYR)
 syr^c (Syriac Curetonian)
 Gospels; 5th
 syr^s (Syriac Sinaiticus)
 Gospels; 4th
 syr^h (Syriac Harklensis) Entire
 NT; 616

OLD LATIN (IT)
 it^a (Vercellenis) Gospels; 4th
 it^b (Veronensis) Gospels; 5th
 it^d (Cantabrigiensis—the Latin
 text of Bezae) Gospels, Acts,
 3 John; 5th
 it^e (Palantinus) Gospels; 5th
 it^k (Bobiensis) Matthew, Mark;
 c. 400

COPTIC (COP)
 cop^{bo} (Boharic—north Egypt)
 cop^{fav} (Fayyumic—central Egypt)
 cop^{sa} (Sahidic—southern Egypt)

OTHER VERSIONS
 arm (Armenian)
 eth (Ethiopic)
 geo (Georgian)

TRANSLITERATION AND NUMBERING SYSTEM

Note: For words and roots from non-biblical languages (e.g., Arabic, Ugaritic), only approximate transliterations are given.

HEBREW/ARAMAIC

Consonants

א	<i>aleph</i>	= '	מ, ם	<i>mem</i>	= <i>m</i>
ב, ך	<i>beth</i>	= <i>b</i>	נ, ן	<i>nun</i>	= <i>n</i>
ג, ך	<i>gimel</i>	= <i>g</i>	ס	<i>samekh</i>	= <i>s</i>
ד, ך	<i>daleth</i>	= <i>d</i>	ע	<i>ayin</i>	= '
ה	<i>he</i>	= <i>h</i>	פ, ן, ף	<i>pe</i>	= <i>p</i>
ו	<i>waw</i>	= <i>w</i>	צ, ץ	<i>tsadhe</i>	= <i>ts</i>
ז	<i>zayin</i>	= <i>z</i>	ק	<i>qoph</i>	= <i>q</i>
ח	<i>heth</i>	= <i>kh</i>	ר	<i>resh</i>	= <i>r</i>
ט	<i>teth</i>	= <i>t</i>	ש	<i>shin</i>	= <i>sh</i>
י	<i>yodh</i>	= <i>y</i>	שׁ	<i>sin</i>	= <i>s</i>
כ, ך, ך	<i>kaph</i>	= <i>k</i>	ת, ת	<i>taw</i>	= <i>t, th</i> (spirant)
ל	<i>lamedh</i>	= <i>l</i>			

Vowels

ַ	<i>patakh</i>	= <i>a</i>	ֿ	<i>qamets khatuf</i>	= <i>o</i>
ֿ	<i>furtive patakh</i>	= <i>a</i>	ֿ	<i>holem</i>	= <i>o</i>
ֿ	<i>qamets</i>	= <i>a</i>	ֿ	<i>full holem</i>	= <i>o</i>
ֿ	<i>final qamets he</i>	= <i>ah</i>	ֿ	<i>short qibbutz</i>	= <i>u</i>
ֿ	<i>segol</i>	= <i>e</i>	ֿ	<i>long qibbutz</i>	= <i>u</i>
ֿ	<i>tsere</i>	= <i>e</i>	ֿ	<i>shureq</i>	= <i>u</i>
ֿ	<i>tsere yod</i>	= <i>e</i>	ֿ	<i>khatuf patakh</i>	= <i>a</i>
ֿ	<i>short hireq</i>	= <i>i</i>	ֿ	<i>khatuf qamets</i>	= <i>o</i>
ֿ	<i>long hireq</i>	= <i>i</i>	ֿ	<i>vocalic shewa</i>	= <i>e</i>
ֿ	<i>hireq yod</i>	= <i>i</i>	ֿ	<i>patakh yodh</i>	= <i>a</i>

Greek

α	<i>alpha</i>	= <i>a</i>	ε	<i>epsilon</i>	= <i>e</i>
β	<i>beta</i>	= <i>b</i>	ζ	<i>zeta</i>	= <i>z</i>
γ	<i>gamma</i>	= <i>g, n</i> (before γ, κ, ξ, χ)	η	<i>eta</i>	= <i>ē</i>
δ	<i>delta</i>	= <i>d</i>	θ	<i>theta</i>	= <i>th</i>
			ι	<i>iota</i>	= <i>i</i>

κ	<i>kappa</i>	= k	τ	<i>tau</i>	= t
λ	<i>lamda</i>	= l	υ	<i>upsilon</i>	= u
μ	<i>mu</i>	= m	φ	<i>phi</i>	= ph
ν	<i>nu</i>	= n	χ	<i>chi</i>	= ch
ξ	<i>ksi</i>	= x	ψ	<i>psi</i>	= ps
ο	<i>omicron</i>	= o	ω	<i>omega</i>	= ō
π	<i>pi</i>	= p	·	<i>rough</i>	= h (with
ρ	<i>rho</i>	= r (ῥ = rh)		<i>breathing</i>	vowel or
σ, ς	<i>sigma</i>	= s		<i>mark</i>	diphthong)

THE TYNDALE-STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series uses a word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

There are two main numbering systems used for biblical words today. The one familiar to most people is the Strong's numbering system (made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible*). Although the original Strong's system is still quite useful, the most up-to-date research has shed new light on the biblical languages and allows for more precision than is found in the original Strong's system. The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary series, therefore, features a newly revised version of the Strong's system, the Tyndale-Strong's numbering system. The Tyndale-Strong's system brings together the familiarity of the Strong's system and the best of modern scholarship. In most cases, the original Strong's numbers are preserved. In places where new research dictates, new or related numbers have been added.¹

The second major numbering system today is the Goodrick-Kohlenberger system used in a number of study tools published by Zondervan. In order to give students broad access to a number of helpful tools, the Commentary provides index numbers for the Zondervan system as well.

The different index systems are designated as follows:

TG	Tyndale-Strong's Greek number	ZH	Zondervan Hebrew number
ZG	Zondervan Greek number	TA	Tyndale-Strong's Aramaic number
TH	Tyndale-Strong's Hebrew number	ZA	Zondervan Aramaic number

So in the example, "love" *agapē* [T626, Z627], the first number is the one to use with Greek tools keyed to the Tyndale-Strong's system, and the second applies to tools that use the Zondervan system.

1. Generally, one may simply use the original four-digit Strong's number to identify words in tools using Strong's system. If a Tyndale-Strong's number is followed by a capital letter (e.g., T61692A), it generally indicates an added subdivision of meaning for the given term. Whenever a Tyndale-Strong's number has a number following a decimal point (e.g., T62013.1), it reflects an instance where new research has yielded a separate, new classification of use for a biblical word. Forthcoming tools from Tyndale House Publishers will include these entries, which were not part of the original Strong's system.



Ephesians

HAROLD W. HOEHNER

INTRODUCTION TO *Ephesians*

THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS has long been a favorite among Christians over the centuries. It contains the leading themes of Pauline literature, and it expresses Paul's motive for his ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. The ideas in Ephesians represent the crown of Paulinism (Dodd 1929:1224-1225) or the "quintessence of Paulinism" (Bruce 1967:303). The book of Ephesians, presenting an exalted view of the church and its relationship to the exalted Christ, contributed richly to the first-century believers' understanding of eternal truths. Its message is just as rich and relevant to today's church.

AUTHOR

Prior to the last two centuries, Paul's authorship of this letter was not questioned, but much has been written in the past 200 years that casts doubts on his authorship. An examination of this problem will be divided into two parts: The traditional view of Pauline authorship will be stated, and then various arguments used to suggest that Ephesians was written by someone other than Paul will be introduced.

The Traditional View of Pauline Authorship. The traditional view of Pauline authorship is based on internal and external evidence. Regarding internal evidence, Ephesians clearly claims to have been written by Paul. In typical Pauline fashion, he opened his letter with the identifier: "Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus" (1:1; cf. 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Col 1:1). He again mentioned his name in 3:1, which is consistent with his other letters (2 Cor 10:1; Gal 5:2; Col 1:23; 4:18; 1 Thess 2:18; 2 Thess 3:17; Phlm 1:19). Descriptions mentioned in the first person singular (3:1; 4:1) correspond with depictions of Paul from his other letters (Phil 1:13, 17; Col 4:3; Phlm 1:1, 9) and from Acts (Acts 25:14, 27; 28:17; cf. 16:37; 21:33; 24:27; 26:29). Thus, the internal evidence of Paul's claim of authorship of this letter clearly corresponds with other letters written by him.

Regarding external evidence, Ephesians has the earliest attestation of any New Testament book. As early as the late first century or very early second century, Clement of Rome (fl. 96) mentions "one God and one Christ and one Spirit," which probably alludes to Ephesians 4:4-6. Furthermore, Clement's prayer that God would "open the eyes of our heart that we might know you [God]" is an allusion to Ephesians 1:17-18, the mention of "the senseless and darkened heart" is an allusion

to Ephesians 4:18, and his exhortation to “let each be subject to his neighbor” is reminiscent of Ephesians 5:21. Ignatius (AD 35–107/8), bishop of Antioch, seems to allude to Ephesians 5:1-2 when he mentions that the Ephesians were imitators of God by their demonstration of love to him, and he also shows familiarity with the armor of God described in chapter 6. Polycarp (AD 69–135), bishop of Smyrna, quotes Ephesians 4:26 and Psalm 4:5 and calls them both Scripture, making Ephesians the first New Testament epistle to be called “Scripture” by the apostolic fathers. Polycarp also makes reference to Ephesians 2:5, 8-9 and 6:11-17, further indicating his acquaintance with the letter. Furthermore, Irenaeus (AD 130–200), Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215), the Muratorian Canon (possibly from Rome; ca. AD 170–200), and Tertullian of Carthage (AD 166–220) acknowledge that Ephesians is a letter by Paul. Hence, Ephesians is not only the first New Testament book to have been recognized as Scripture, but its attestation of Pauline authorship is very early and from various geographical areas of the New Testament world.

The Dispute over Pauline Authorship. Despite this early and diverse attestation to Paul as the author of Ephesians, many scholars throughout the past 200 years have posited arguments for rejecting Pauline authorship. Six of the major objections will be discussed here—each followed by an analysis and a rebuttal.

1. *Impersonal nature.* It was not until 1792 that an English clergyman named Evanson (1792:261-262) first doubted Pauline authorship of Ephesians. He posited that it was inconsistent for the writer of Ephesians to claim that he had just heard of the Ephesians’ faith (1:15-16), when according to Acts, Paul had spent more than two years at Ephesus. Paul first arrived in Ephesus at the end of his second missionary journey in the autumn of 52, and after a short ministry he left for Jerusalem, leaving Priscilla and Aquila there (Acts 18:18-21). A year later (in autumn of 53), on his third missionary journey, he returned to Ephesus and remained there for two and a half years, leaving in the spring of 56 (Acts 19:1–20:1). A year after that (in spring of 57), he visited the elders of Ephesus at Miletus on his way to Jerusalem from Corinth (Acts 20:16-38). It is argued that since Paul spent considerable time with the Ephesians, it seems remarkable that he speaks of “having heard” of their faith and love (1:15) and further that he closes the letter with a brief impersonal farewell. In addition, Paul questions whether or not they had heard of the administration of the grace of God given him to minister to Gentiles, including those at Ephesus (3:2), and also questions their reception of the instruction they received (4:21). Interestingly, there are no personal greetings to individuals in the Ephesian church. By contrast, in letters such as the one addressed to Rome, a place he had never visited, there are extended greetings from him in the last two chapters of the book.

The impersonal tone of the letter, however, is not extraordinary. First, Paul was not obligated to give personal greetings at the end of each letter; there are none in 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, or Philippians, for example. In the case of 2 Corinthians, Paul had stayed with them for 18 months, and in that of Galatians, he had been with them only a few months before he wrote his letter.

Even though greetings are absent in these books, very few deny their Pauline authorship. Second, though the letter addresses those in Ephesus, it may have been an encyclical letter intended for other churches in the area. An example of this is the Colossian letter, which was addressed specifically to the Colossians (Col 1:2) but was to be read by the Laodiceans, who in turn were to let the Colossians read the letter addressed to them (Col 4:16). It is not improbable to surmise that a letter addressed to a city like Ephesus may have been intended to go elsewhere as well. It is true that the letter to the Colossians is more personal, but this may be explained by the fact that Colossae and Laodicea were neighboring villages and the people of both communities knew each other. On the other hand, Ephesus was not only a commercial and political center in western Asia Minor but also the center of Paul's ministry from which many other churches were started by him and his disciples during and after his stay there. Hence, it is reasonable to think that this letter would go to many other churches within Ephesus and the surrounding areas, which would explain the lack of the personal element. As already mentioned, Galatians has no personal greetings and was an encyclical letter, since it was addressed to the "churches of Galatia" (Gal 1:2). Third, since Paul had not visited Ephesus for five or six years, it is likely that there were many new believers with whom he had little or no acquaintance. Furthermore, he may not have wished to single out those whom he knew since his emphasis was on the unity of all believers. Fourth, the letter to the Ephesians is not completely impersonal. Paul mentions the fact that he is praying for them (1:16), and he asks for their prayers (6:19-20), which indicate some familiarity with the believers there. Moreover, it seems that the better Paul knew a church, the fewer personal greetings he gave. For example, Romans, where Paul had never been, has the most extensive greetings, while in the letters to the church in Thessalonica, where Paul had been only a few weeks earlier, has no greetings. It may be that one of the reasons for personal greetings was to strengthen his credibility. If this were the case, greetings would be most necessary in the cities where he had never been. Conversely, it would be least necessary in letters to churches where the recipients knew him well. Thus, the impersonal tone of the letter in no way necessitates the denial of Pauline authorship of Ephesians.

2. *Language and style.* With regards to language it is suggested that Ephesians has too many unique words to be Pauline. Statistically, Ephesians has 2,425 words with a total vocabulary of 529 words. There are 41 words Paul used only in Ephesians while 84 words in Ephesians are not found elsewhere in Paul's writings but do occur elsewhere in the New Testament. How does this compare with other Pauline literature? Galatians has similar characteristics, namely, 2,220 words with a total vocabulary of 526 words; and virtually no one doubts its Pauline authorship. There are 35 words Paul used only in Galatians and there are 90 words in Galatians that are not found elsewhere in Paul but do occur elsewhere in the New Testament. Hence, the total vocabulary is about the same, Ephesians has slightly more words unique to the NT than Galatians, and Galatians has more words not used elsewhere in Paul but elsewhere in the New Testament—even though Galatians is ten percent

shorter than Ephesians! Does this suggest that Paul did not write Galatians? Most would not say so. Even Mitton (1951:29) admits that several undisputed works of Paul have a higher percentage of words not found in other Pauline letters. Hence, the unique use of vocabulary does not demonstrate the non-Pauline authorship of Ephesians.

The same reasoning can be applied to unique phrases used in Ephesians. Lincoln (1990:lxv) lists 15 word combinations or phrases in Ephesians unique within Pauline literature. However, there are more than 15 unique expressions in Galatians compared to the Pauline corpus. Again these unique expressions in Galatians do not prove Paul did not write this letter. Unique expressions are due to the mood and content of the letter, the recipients of the letter, and the flexibility and ingenuity of the author. It is also pointed out that the Greek prepositions *en* [T^G1722, Z^G1877] (in) and *kata* [T^G2596, Z^G2848] (down, according to) are used more frequently in Ephesians than in Paul's undisputed letters (the "undisputed" corpus varies from four to seven letters). However, in examining the undisputed letters one notices much greater frequency of the prepositions *dia* [T^G1223, Z^G1328] (through), *epi* [T^G1909, Z^G2093] (on), *para* [T^G3844, Z^G4123] (from, with) in Romans, and *ek* [T^G1537, Z^G1666] (out of, *para* [T^G3844, Z^G4123] (from, with) and *hupo* [T^G5259, Z^G5679] (by, under) in Galatians. Other similar examples could be cited, but none would cause one to conclude that Romans and Galatians were not written by Paul. Although the preposition *kata* [T^G2596, Z^G2848] (down, according to) is used more frequently in Ephesians than in other Pauline letters, it is used quite often in Galatians; in fact, its use with the genitive case occurs much more frequently in Galatians than in any other Pauline letter, but it does not follow that Galatians is not Pauline. Therefore, on the basis of vocabulary one cannot determine the authorship of a letter.

In addition to language, the style in which Ephesians is written has caused some to question Pauline authorship. For example, Ephesians has eight lengthy sentences. However, van Roon (1974:105-111) has pointed out that Paul uses long sentences in doxologies and prayers (cf. 1:3-14, 15-23; 3:14-19; Rom 8:38-39; 11:33-36; 1 Cor 1:4-8; Phil 1:3-8; 1 Thess 1:2-5; 2 Thess 1:3-10), doctrinal content (cf. 2:1-7; 3:2-13; Rom 3:21-26; 1 Cor 1:26-29; 2:6-9) and parenthetical materials (cf. 4:1-6, 11-16; 6:14-20; 1 Cor 12:8-11; Phil 1:27-2:11). Furthermore, would one argue that since Galatians uses short incisive language and abrupt statements not found in other Pauline letters, it could not be by the hand of Paul? Unlikely. Others have argued that the style of Ephesians is not out of character with the other Pauline literature (Turner 1963:84-85; Neumann 1990:194-199, 206-211, 213-226).

In conclusion it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine authorship on the basis of language and style. This is readily evident in the present day. For example, an engineer uses different vocabulary and style when he writes to his colleague, his senator, his friend, his wife, or his children.

3. *Literary relationships.* It is proposed that certain remarkable similarities in vocabulary, phraseology, and thematic development between Ephesians and Colossians point to a Pauline imitator as the author of Ephesians. Regarding vocab-

ulary, Mitton (1951:58-59, 97) concludes that Colossians verbally parallels 26.5 percent of Ephesians and Ephesians parallels 34 percent of Colossians. However, these statistics are not as formidable as they might first appear. By using a database to observe the parallels, it becomes apparent that only 246 words are shared between the two epistles out of a total of the 2,429 words in Ephesians and 1,574 words in Colossians. Furthermore, many of the 246 words are used many times since they include conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, and proper nouns (e.g., God, Christ). The repeated use of these 246 words makes up 2,057 words (out of the 2,429 words) in Ephesians and 1,362 words (out of the 1,574 words) in Colossians. Finally, these similarities are understandable since the two works have similar content.

Conversely, there are 21 words in Ephesians and Colossians not found elsewhere in Paul but found elsewhere in the New Testament and only 11 words in Ephesians and Colossians that are not found elsewhere in the New Testament. It seems that an imitator's letter to the Ephesians would have more closely corresponded to Paul's letter to the Colossians, especially since much of the content is similar.

Beyond individual words, one needs to look at the linkage of words to see if the similarities between Ephesians and Colossians are enough to suggest non-Pauline authorship. In three verses, there is a string of seven consecutive words that correspond exactly in the two letters (Eph 1:1-2 = Col 1:1-2; Eph 3:2 = Col 1:25; Eph 3:9 = Col 1:26). Twice there is exact correspondence of five consecutive words (Eph 1:7 = Col 1:14; Eph 4:16 = Col 2:9). Finally, in the information about Tychicus (6:21-22; Col 4:7-8) there are 29 consecutive words of Colossians repeated in Ephesians, except the words "and fellow servant" are omitted. Because of these literary correspondences, Mitton (1951:58-59, 67) concludes that the author of Ephesians must have known Colossians almost by heart. Why would anyone memorize such spiritually insignificant details regarding Tychicus? It is more likely that Paul wrote both letters at approximately the same time and when he came to the end of the second letter, he referred to the conclusion of the first letter since it was applicable to both. If the author of Ephesians had known Colossians almost by heart, he would likely have memorized the more important portions for the sake of accuracy in order to convince the recipients that it was Paul's work. There is actually very little consecutive verbal agreement between the two letters.

Regarding thematic development, much of the thought and sequence of the themes in Ephesians and Colossians are similar. Lincoln (1990:li-lviii) believes that the author of Ephesians used Colossians in writing his letter. He notes two reasons for this conclusion. First, there is verbal correlation within parallel sections. The greetings are similar, both having "saints" and "faithful in Christ (Jesus)," a combination not found in other Pauline letters. There is verbal correspondence with key words (e.g., redemption, reconciliation, body, flesh, tribulation, ministry, mystery, power) in parallel sections, which, according to Lincoln and others, indicates that the author of Ephesians "clearly" borrowed from Colossians (e.g., 2:11-16; Col 1:15-22). In the last half of the book, the author of Ephesians appears to utilize

apostles and prophets. Paul was specifically commissioned to proclaim this to the Gentiles (3:1-12). Further, the theme of reconciliation is seen in the expressions “Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings” (3:6) and “we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence” (3:12).

Finally, Paul prays that the believers might know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge (3:17-19) in the hope that the reconciliation is not just external but a reality of the heart. The evidence of reconciliation is that believers live in unity, which has its basis in the Trinity (4:1-6). In order to accomplish this, Christ gave gifts to the church so that the corporate body of believing Jews and Gentiles might continue to be built up until the unity of faith is realized in practical life (4:7-16). Believers are exhorted not to live as the Gentiles do but to develop an honest and loving relationship with one another (4:17-5:14). They are instructed to be filled by the Spirit, which results in praising, singing, and giving thanks to God the Father through Christ, all of which is evidence of their new spiritual unity due to Christ’s reconciliation (5:15-20). Instructions regarding relationships of wives with husbands, children with parents, and slaves with masters are for the purpose of promoting harmony—another evidence of reconciliation (5:21-6:9).

The theology of reconciliation is prominent in this letter, and the heart of reconciliation is love. The basis of reconciliation between God and humanity is God’s love (2:4) and Christ’s love (3:17-19; 5:2). Likewise, the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles is to be characterized by love for one another (1:15; 3:17-19; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2, 25, 28, 33; 6:23). Reconciliation with love is genuine reconciliation because it reveals a change of heart and a mutual trust of one another.

OUTLINE

- I. The Calling of the Church (1:1-3:21)
 - A. Prologue (1:1-2)
 - B. Praise for God’s Planned Spiritual Blessings (1:3-14)
 1. The provision of spiritual blessings (1:3)
 2. The basis of spiritual blessings (1:4-14)
 - a. God’s election (1:4-6)
 - b. God’s redemption in Christ (1:7-12)
 - c. God’s seal with the Spirit (1:13-14)
 - C. Prayer for Wisdom and Revelation (1:15-23)
 - D. New Position Individually (2:1-10)
 1. The old condition: dead to God (2:1-3)
 2. The new position: alive in God (2:4-10)
 - E. New Position Corporately (2:11-22)
 1. Statement of the union (2:11-13)
 2. Explanation of the union (2:14-18)
 3. Consequence of the union (2:19-22)

- F. The Mystery Explained (3:1-13)
 - 1. The mystery (3:1-6)
 - 2. The ministry (3:7-13)
- G. Prayer for Strengthened Love (3:14-21)
 - 1. The approach to prayer (3:14-15)
 - 2. The appeal in prayer (3:16-19)
 - 3. The ascription of praise (3:20-21)
- II. The Conduct of the Church (4:1-6:24)
 - A. Live in Unity (4:1-16)
 - 1. The basis of unity (4:1-6)
 - 2. The preservation of unity (4:7-16)
 - B. Live in Holiness (4:17-32)
 - 1. Description of the old unregenerated person (4:17-19)
 - 2. Description of the new regenerated person (4:20-32)
 - C. Live in Love (5:1-6)
 - D. Live in Light (5:7-14)
 - E. Live in Wisdom (5:15-6:9)
 - 1. Admonition (5:15-21)
 - 2. Application (5:22-6:9)
 - a. Wives and husbands (5:22-33)
 - b. Children and parents (6:1-4)
 - c. Servants and masters (6:5-9)
 - F. Stand in Warfare (6:10-20)
 - 1. Put on the armor (6:10-13)
 - 2. Stand with the armor (6:14-16)
 - 3. Take the last pieces of armor (6:17-20)
 - G. Conclusion (6:21-24)

COMMENTARY ON
Ephesians

◆ I. The Calling of the Church (1:1–3:21)
A. Prologue (1:1–2)

This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.

²May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

I am writing to God's holy people in Ephesus,* who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus.

1:1 The most ancient manuscripts do not include *in Ephesus*.

NOTES

1:1 *This letter is from Paul.* As with other Pauline letters, Ephesians follows the normal pattern of Hellenistic letters with respect to its opening, body, and closing. The opening is similar to openings of other letters by Paul. As discussed in the Introduction, there has been considerable debate in recent centuries as to whether or not Paul is truly the author of this epistle. Although some differences exist when compared to the other Pauline letters, there is no reason to doubt Pauline authorship, which has the earliest attestation among the church fathers concerning any New Testament book (see Introduction).

chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus. This statement is in keeping with other Pauline literature; it affirms that Paul was not self-appointed.

I am writing to God's holy people in Ephesus. "God's holy people" is rendered "saints" in other translations. It refers to people who have put their trust in Christ Jesus. The word "saints" (*hagiois* [T⁶⁴⁰/A, Z⁶⁴¹]) does not imply inherent goodness but rather separateness, that is, people set aside to serve God (L&N 53.46). As indicated in the Introduction (see "Audience"), many scholars have questioned the reading "in Ephesus," because the words are lacking in the three earliest mss (P⁴⁶ X B) and the tone of the letter is very impersonal, strongly suggesting it was an encyclical (Comfort 2005:345-346). However, the words "in Ephesus" have decent manuscript support with widespread geographical attestation (X² A B² D F G 0278 33 M it syr cop) and are included in most English versions (KJV, NASB, NEB, NIV, NRSV, NLT). Notably, the letter is not addressed to a church in Ephesus, but to the saints in that city, and this may well mean that there were many congregations within the city and also that it may have been read by many churches started by Paul or his converts in the surrounding area, namely, western Asia Minor.

who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus. This may appear to imply that only faithful believers are being addressed. Actually in the Greek text it is not the relative pronoun "who" that introduces these words but the conjunction *kai* [T⁶²⁵³², Z⁶²⁷⁷⁹] (and), which could be translated "that is," and the word "faithful" could be translated "believers"; the resulting translation would be "that is, believers in Christ Jesus." Hence, "God's holy people in Ephesus" are further defined as "believers in Christ Jesus."

1:2 *May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.* This is a greeting that is not unlike other Pauline letters (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phlm 1:3).

COMMENTARY

The writer of this letter immediately identifies himself as Paul, an apostle, belonging to and sent by Christ Jesus. The greeting is typical of letters in Paul's day. In modern Western culture, a letter begins with the address followed by the date of writing, then we greet the recipient: "Dear ____." The body of the letter follows with our name signed at the end. In Paul's day the writer began the letter by identifying himself or herself. Translating the Greek text literally, the letter begins, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, to the saints in Ephesus." Here the sender is identified as Paul the apostle of Christ, and the recipients are identified as the saints who reside in Ephesus. The fact that he presents himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ gives Paul authority. An apostle is one who is sent as a messenger and who represents the full authority of the one who sent him or her. It is similar to a present-day ambassador who represents his or her country with the full authority of that country's government. Paul, as an apostle of Christ Jesus, had the full authority of Christ himself; therefore, he needed to be heard. To further enhance his claim as an apostle of Christ, Paul stated that this appointment was made through the will of God and not by self-appointment. As an ambassador is appointed by the head of state, so Paul was appointed by God to be his representative.

The recipients of the letter are "God's holy people" or literally "the saints." The Greek term for "saint" (*hagios* [TG40/A, ZG41]) can be translated "holy" and is used with reference to things, places, and persons. The term "holy" or "saint" did not indicate inherent goodness but rather that which was set aside for service. In fact, the related Hebrew root *qadash* [TH6942, ZH7727] was even used of foreign cult prostitutes (*qadash* [TH6945, ZH7728]; cf. Deut 23:17; 1 Kgs 14:24; 15:12; 22:46) that were set aside for "service" in temple ritual (TDOT 12.524). Today the term "saint" is used by some to identify those thought to have earned the title by holy living. However, the New Testament teaches that all who become believers in Christ are saints—that is, ones set apart for God's service. It is because of this position as saints that believers should live saintly lives. The fact that saints are not inherently holy is substantiated in Paul's letters, including Ephesians, where he exhorts saints to live holy lives. If saints were inherently holy, there would be no need for the exhortations. Paul further describes the saints as ones "who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus" or better "believers in Christ Jesus." Later (2:1-10) Paul writes that they were at one time unbelievers who were part of the world system, but by God's grace they were saved by faith. While the Ephesian believers were geographically located in Ephesus, they were spiritually positioned "in Christ." Paul used "in Christ Jesus," "in Christ," or "in him/whom" 11 times in 1:1-14. This applies to all Christians whether they live in Ephesus, Paris, Trivandrum, or San Francisco.

The greeting in verse 2 is not normal Greek style, but it accords with Paul's style in other letters (cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Phil 1:2; 2 Thess 1:2;

Phlm 1:3). Instead of the normal Greek greeting “rejoice,” Paul uses “grace” and “peace” which had become a distinctively Christian greeting (cf. 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Pet 1:2; 2 John 1:3; Rev 1:4). Grace speaks of God’s favor in providing salvation for sinners through Christ’s sacrificial death (e.g., 1:7; 2:8; Rom 3:23-24) and his empowering of the believer to lead a holy life (4:7, 29; 1 Cor 15:10). Peace was used as a common greeting in the Semitic world (*shalom* [TH7965, ZH8934]; Gen 43:23; Judg 19:20 [KJV]; 1 Sam 25:6), denoting the idea of “well-being” (Gen 29:6; 43:27; 2 Sam 18:29). In Ephesians it may signify the sinner’s peace with God (e.g., 2:14, 17) and the believer’s peace with others (e.g., 2:15; 4:3). Thus, grace expresses the motivation behind God’s gracious work, and peace, the effect of God’s work. Characteristic of Paul, these words of greetings are followed by “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:3; Gal 1:3; Phil 1:2; 2 Thess 1:2; Phlm 1:3), indicating the source of grace and peace. God is not only called Father but “our” Father to denote personal relationship. Furthermore, grace and peace come not only from God but also from the Lord Jesus Christ. Since only one preposition is used to denote the source of grace and peace, from both the Father and the Son, it strongly implies that the Father and Son are equal and thus Jesus Christ is divine. In conclusion, then, believers are to appreciate and appropriate the grace that brought salvation and its resulting peace, both of which come from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

◆ B. Praise for God's Planned Spiritual Blessings (1:3–14)

1. The provision of spiritual blessings (1:3)

³All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

NOTES

1:3 who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. The term “blessed” (*eulogeō* [IG2127, Z62328]) is rather vague in English. In OT usage, to be blessed by God meant to receive benefits from God such as possessions, prosperity, or power. The term is used over 40 times in the NT, and though many times it is used when people “praise” God (e.g., Luke 1:64; Jas 3:9) or Jesus (Matt 21:9; Mark 11:9-10; Luke 19:38; John 12:13) and invoke God’s enabling power (Luke 2:34; 24:50, 51; Heb 7:1, 6), it is also used, as in the present context, where God is the subject who “provides benefits” to the recipients (Matt 25:34; Acts 3:25, 26; Gal 3:9; Heb 6:14). This is followed with a cognate noun “blessing” (*eulogia* [IG2129, Z62330]), which conveys the idea of “benefits” both in the OT (Gen 27:35-36, 38, 41; 49:25-26; Isa 44:3) and in the NT (Rom 15:29; Gal 3:14; Heb 6:7; 12:17; 1 Pet 3:9). Such usage is fitting in the present context. The nature of the enrichment or benefit is “spiritual.” The sense, therefore, is that God has enriched us with every spiritual benefit necessary for our spiritual well-being.

in the heavenly realms. The heavenly realms (traditionally, “heavenlies”) in classical Greek can refer to the place where the gods dwell and from which they come. This word appears in the LXX 5 times but only once in the canonical books (Ps 67:15; numbered 68:14 in English Bible) where it refers to the Almighty or possibly to God’s rule. In the NT it occurs 19 times, 5 of which are in Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12). It has a local sense, denoting the place where the exalted Christ is and the place from which believers derive their

spiritual blessings. Later Paul mentions evil hosts in the heavenly realms (3:10) and the believer's struggle with them in the present day (6:12). The spiritual benefits for the believers are from the heavenly realms and the unbelievers' opposition to the believers finds its source in wicked spiritual leaders who also reside in the heavenly realms (6:12). In other words, the struggles in the heavenlies are also played out on earth. Hence, the believers reside on earth having been enriched with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms necessary for their spiritual well-being.

because we are united with Christ. The phrase "in Christ" (or "in the Lord") occurs 36 times in Ephesians. It may convey the idea of instrumentality ("through Christ"), but surely it can have the local sense of "the place" in whom the believers are. It speaks of a definite union between the believer and Christ. Thus, it has the local sense of the believer being incorporated in Christ. The believer, who is united with Christ who is in heaven, partakes of the spiritual benefits from the heavenly realms.

COMMENTARY

Usually after the greeting Paul would give an introductory thanksgiving for the recipients of the letter. However, in this letter he first offered a paean of praise for God's benefits to the believers (1:3-14), which is then followed by thanksgiving (1:15-23). In the Greek text, verses 3-14 are one long sentence of 202 words, considered by one scholar to be the most monstrous sentence in the Greek language (Norden 1913:253). This is the first of eight lengthy sentences in the book (1:3-14, 15-23; 2:1-7; 3:2-13, 14-19; 4:1-6, 11-16; 6:14-20). Three of these (1:3-14, 15-23; 3:14-19) are praise and prayer, for which it is not unusual to have lengthy sentences. Even in present times, it is not uncommon in extemporaneous praise and prayer to have long, complicated sentences, with many subordinate clauses and phrases.

In the last hundred years there has been much discussion on the form and structure of this passage. In the final analysis, it appears that 1:3-14 is a eulogy (literally, "a well-speaking of," not reserved just for funerals) whose style accords with other Jewish-Hellenistic eulogies, but its content goes beyond them. In the abundance of descriptive words in this long, complicated sentence regarding God's purpose, plan, and action, there is form and development of thought. The form is demonstrated by the refrain "praise and glory to God" (1:12; see also 1:6, 14), which is given after mentioning each person of the Trinity in the order of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The development is demonstrated by the progression from a pronouncement of praise to God (1:3), to a description of God's great plan and action (1:4-12), and finally to its application to the believers (1:13-14). This eulogy is a very fitting introduction to the letter as a whole.

In this eulogy, Paul calls upon the believers to praise "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Praise means "to speak well of," and the one to be praised is the eternal God, who is further described as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, the title "Father" is rarely used to describe God, whereas in the New Testament more than 50 percent of the occurrences of the word "father" refer to God (250 times out of 413 total). Paul says God is the Father of "our Lord Jesus Christ." "Jesus" is his personal name, and the designation "Lord" indicates his status as master and his identity with Yahweh ("Jesus is Lord" was an early confession of the

church—Acts 2:36; 8:16; 10:36; 11:17; 19:5; Rom 10:9; 14:9; 1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 2:11). His designation “Christ” is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew word *mesiah*; it denotes that he is the promised, anointed one who would bring salvation.

The reason to praise God is twofold: for who he is—the eternal God—and for what he has done—having blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. The verb “to bless” is rarely used in Greek literature, but, as stated above, it is frequently used in the Old Testament, where God is said to enrich his people with possessions, prosperity, or power. It is the opposite of a curse, which signifies a pronouncement of destruction. The nature of these God-given benefits is spiritual, having their source in the Spirit of God; they are supernatural, in contrast to that which is natural—originating from an earthly source. These spiritual benefits enable believers to live effectively here on earth by God’s empowerment and enrichment. The number of benefits is indicated by the word “every,” signifying the complete adequacy of these blessings for the believer’s spiritual well-being. Also, the location of the source is significant because these spiritual benefits issue from the believers’ union with Christ, with whom they are seated in the heavenly realms (2:6).

The text indicates that this provision of every spiritual benefit has already been made available, although the appropriation of them occurs during the course of the believer’s lifetime. An analogy of this is God’s promise to Joshua (Josh 1:3) that every place in the Promised Land on which he placed his foot had already been given to him, in accordance with God’s promise to Moses. Although it had been given, it was not a reality until he placed his foot on it. It would have been unnecessary for Joshua to pray for land that already had been given to him. He was to place his foot on it by faith. Likewise, it is unnecessary for believers to pray for spiritual blessings already provided for them. The reason why believers do not receive spiritual benefits is not because God is stingy or they have not prayed for them, but because they are not appropriating by faith what God has already given to them. Every spiritual benefit is at our disposal for our spiritual well-being.

◆ 2. The basis of spiritual blessings (1:4-14)

a. God’s election (1:4-6)

⁴Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus

Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. ⁶So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.*

1:6 Greek *to us in the beloved*.

NOTES

1:4 *Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ*. The NLT text leaves out the adverb *kathōs* [T⁶2531, Z⁶2777], which conjoins verses 4-14 to verse 3. The adverb also indicates that the following verses serve as the basis of the spiritual benefits with which believers are enriched. The adverb could be rendered “even as” (ASV, RSV) or



Philippians

PHILIP W. COMFORT

INTRODUCTION TO *Philippians*

OF ALL PAUL'S EPISTLES, *Philippians* is among the most autobiographical. Paul was sharing with the Philippians the desires of his spirit and heart at that time in his life. He was under house arrest awaiting trial and experiencing the anxiousness that accompanied the uncertainty of the outcome. He was prepared to die and ready to live. Both were good because both meant further relationship with Christ. Sensing that he would live, Paul expressed his aspiration to know Christ as much as possible—not just the glorious Christ but the Christ who became man and servant, forsaken and crucified—then raised and glorified. This is stated in his famous words: “I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death” (3:10-11). He urged the Philippians—and all Christians—to share the same aspirations and to pursue the goal of knowing Christ.

AUTHOR

The first verse of this epistle identifies the authors as “Paul and Timothy.” Paul and Timothy are also mentioned as coauthors in 2 Corinthians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians (with Silvanus), 2 Thessalonians (with Silvanus), and Philemon. In three of these epistles (2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians), the use of “we” signals joint authorship. In 2 Corinthians most of the epistle is written by Paul, who uses the personal “I.” In 1 and 2 Thessalonians, the first person plural “we” is used throughout, with Paul breaking out into the personal “I” only occasionally. These two epistles were coauthored primarily by Paul and Silvanus (see Introduction to these books in this commentary). In *Philippians*, Colossians, and Philemon, the writers are identified as “Paul and Timothy,” but the personal “I” is used throughout, signaling Paul's sole authorship. It is likely that Timothy carried the letter to Philippi and interpreted it to the Philippians, which may be why he is identified as a co-sender.

The style, manner of thought, and teachings in *Philippians* are those of Paul the apostle. The historical allusions throughout the epistle also establish his authorship. These can be found in the mention of Epaphroditus's journey to Paul in prison and the Philippians' contribution to Paul (4:10-18, 25), Epaphroditus's sickness (2:25-30), the reference to Timothy's care for the Philippians (2:19), and the reference to the Philippians having seen his maltreatment at Philippi (1:30). Paul's

autobiographical notations also point to his genuine authorship (1:12-14; 3:4-6; 4:15-18).

Unlike Ephesians and Colossians, where historical allusions and autobiographical notations are sparse and therefore have prompted various scholars to question Pauline authorship of those two epistles, Philippians has historically been accepted as Paul's writing. Paul's authorship is noted in some of the earliest writings of the church fathers, such as Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 3.2 (a passage where Polycarp directly mentions that Paul wrote to them); Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.18.4; Clement of Alexander, *Christ the Educator*; Cyprian, *Testimonies against the Jews* 3.39.

Paul's authorship of Philippians has hardly been questioned throughout the rest of church history. One notable exception is F. C. Baur (1792–1860), who founded the Tübingen school and espoused the view that Paul wrote only Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. According to Baur, all the other so-called Pauline Epistles were authored by others. Baur's theories have been challenged repeatedly, and very few scholars accept his position that Paul did not write Philippians. (For a review of the issue, see Hawthorne 1983:xxviii-xxix.)

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

Assuming the tradition is accurate that states that Paul was executed during Nero's reign, this epistle must have been written before AD 68 (the date of Nero's death). Determining the particular date prior to AD 68, however, depends on the location of Paul's imprisonment. There have been three cities posited by various scholars: Rome, Ephesus, and Caesarea. (Corinth has also been proposed but dismissed by nearly every scholar.) There is a different date connected to each city, correlated with Paul's itinerary.

Rome, AD 61–63. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul indicates that he was in prison (1:13-14). Traditionally, this has been understood to be his house arrest in Rome in AD 60–62. In defense of this position is the fact that Paul mentions the Praetorian Guard (1:13), and he closed the epistle with these words: "And all the rest of God's people send you greetings, too, especially those in Caesar's household" (4:22). A few subscriptions in some Greek manuscripts also indicate that Paul wrote this letter from Rome—namely, B¹ P^{vid} ℞. These subscriptions, of course, were not part of the original work and are therefore scribe's notations about what they thought the place of origin was. The earliest (fourth century) comes from the hand of the first corrector of B.

The Roman imprisonment fits especially well with Paul's mention of the Praetorian Guard (see Tacitus *Histories* 4.46) and Caesar's household—i.e., a significant number of people employed by Caesar. The fact that Paul also spoke of an impending trial that could lead to his death (1:19-20; 2:17) also accords with the Roman imprisonment because there would be no further appeal after Paul faced Caesar's judgment, whereas any other imprisonment would have offered Paul the opportunity to appeal.

However, various scholars have figured that the amount of traveling and the time span of travel between the locations mentioned (and/or assumed) in Philippians

makes another location besides Rome more likely. Deissmann (1923) was one of the first to elaborate on the travels, citing the following points: (1) Timothy was with Paul (1:1) when Paul wrote Philippians, yet Timothy was not with Paul when Paul made his journey to Rome (Acts 26–28). This would have required a journey to Rome for Timothy. (2) Someone must have taken a message from Paul to the Philippians telling them that Paul was a prisoner (4:14). (3) The Philippians collected an offering for Paul, which was brought by Epaphroditus from Philippi to Paul in prison (4:18). (4) Epaphroditus became sick, and news of this came to the Philippians (2:26). (5) Paul then received a message that the Philippians had heard of Epaphroditus's sickness, and Paul reported (in the letter known as Philippians) how this troubled him (2:26). (6) Finally, Epaphroditus, once recovered from his sickness, would have had to journey to Philippi to take Paul's epistle to them (2:25, 28). The letter to the Philippians also indicates (7) that Timothy would soon travel to the Philippians and then (8) return to Paul with news of their situation (2:19).

Deissmann thought it highly unlikely that these journeys between Rome and Philippi could have taken place within the two-year time frame mentioned in Acts 28:30. Furthermore, the adverbs "soon" (2:19, 24) and "just as soon as" (2:23) seem to indicate that the distance between the place of writing and Philippi was not great. Thus, in the end, Deissmann opted for Ephesus as the place of writing (see below).

Although Deissmann's arguments are good, they do not preclude the possibility that all these journeys could have taken place between Rome and Philippi during the two-year period. A journey from Rome to Philippi would take about seven to eight weeks (see Martin 1987:24). Thus, the eight journeys noted above could have happened within the two-year time frame (see Dodd 1953:96ff.).

Ephesus, AD 55. In order to account for the journeys mentioned above, Deissmann proposed Ephesus as the place of Paul's imprisonment. His argument was strengthened by the writings of Duncan (1929), who has been followed by many recent commentators (see, for example, Introductions to Colossians and Philemon in this volume, where Davids argues that these two Prison Epistles were very likely written from Ephesus.) Ephesus was certainly near enough to Philippi for plenty of interchange, but no imprisonment is recorded in the account of Paul's ministry there in Acts. So we would have to assume that Luke's account in Acts 19 was not complete and that Paul had been placed in protective custody at the time of the riot (Acts 19:30–31).

In order to fill in these gaps, some scholars have pointed out that Paul, in 2 Corinthians 11:23–27, noted several imprisonments prior to his Roman captivity. The first epistle of Clement of Rome (*1 Clement* 5:6) indicates that Paul experienced seven imprisonments. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 1:8–10, coupled with the narrative in Acts 20:18–19, tell us that "in Asia Paul suffered extreme hardships even to the point of despairing of life" (Hawthorne 1983:xxxix). And some scholars think that Paul's cryptic remark in 1 Corinthians 15:32 about fighting with wild beasts in Ephesus is an allusion to captivity in Ephesus (see discussion by Martin 1987:28–30). These are all interesting points, but none of them prove that

Paul was ever in prison in Ephesus. In fact, Bruce (1980–1981) indicates that there is not one piece of historical evidence that points to Ephesus. Furthermore, it seems likely that at the time of the writing of Philippians, Paul was clearly facing a capital charge. Had he been imprisoned in Ephesus, could he not have exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to a higher authority?

Caesarea, AD 58. Certain scholars have considered Caesarea as the place of writing. Good arguments have been offered by Robinson (1976:60-61) and Hawthorne (1983:xli-xliv), the chief of which are as follows: (1) It is certain that Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 23:33-35); (2) the imprisonment was a long one, at least two years, allowing for the journeys back and forth from Philippi; (3) it is very possible that Paul's attack against the Jews was directed against those who were trying to kill him both in Jerusalem and Caesarea (Acts 21:37–26:32), whereas the Jews in Rome were not hostile to him (Acts 28:19); (4) the fact that the entire praetorium had heard of Paul's imprisonment for Christ (1:13) fits Caesarea well because Paul was imprisoned in the praetorium of Herod in Caesarea (Acts 23:35) and news of his imprisonment had reached the ears of many, even the procurator himself (Acts 24:24-26).

The major problem with the Caesarean location is that in Philippians Paul indicates that he was facing a life-and-death judgment (1:20; 2:17), whereas in the Caesarean imprisonment it does not appear he was facing imminent martyrdom (see Acts 23:35; 24:23). True, his life was in danger in Caesarea (Acts 21:31, 36; 23:30; 25:3, 24), but this danger came from the Jews plotting to kill him, not from an upcoming trial. Besides, Paul, as a Roman citizen, always had a "trump card"—his right to appeal to Caesar for further trial so as to avert final judgment.

In the final analysis, the traditional location, Rome, suits most elements of the scenario presented in Philippians (see Fee 1995:34-37). As such, Philippians should be dated around AD 62, the last year of Paul's house arrest.

Occasion of Writing. At the most basic level, Philippians was written as a thank-you letter for the gift that the Philippians had sent Paul (1:5; 4:18). At a deeper level, it was written to convey Paul's personal pursuit of knowing the crucified and risen Christ in his (Paul's) present crisis and to encourage the same aspiration and pursuit among the Philippians, especially as the means to promote church unity. Each of these aspects is addressed below under "Major Themes."

AUDIENCE

Philippi was a small village of Thrace until about 357 BC when the father of Alexander the Great, Philip II of Macedon, conquered the site, rebuilt it, and gave the village his name, "Philip's City." Two hundred years later in the Roman era, it became a chief city of one of the four Roman districts into which Macedonia was divided. But because it was about ten miles inland from the port of Neapolis, its growth was limited. Nearby Amphipolis (to the southwest) was the center of Roman government.

(as Christ did in becoming man and dying on the cross), spiritual joy is the result of knowing Christ now and seeing him in his return (as Christ experienced joy when he returned to the Father), and giving to others is directly linked to Christ giving himself over to death so that all who believe in him may have eternal life.

THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

The primary theological issues in this book are found in the Christ Poem (2:6-11). This poem contains some of the most sublime Christological expressions in the New Testament in that it speaks of Christ's preincarnate existence of being coequal with God, his willingness to become a servant, his *kenosis* (cf. *kenōō* [TG2758, ZG3033]; the "emptying-out"), his incarnation, his life of obedience, his humiliating crucifixion, his resurrection, his exaltation, and his eternal lordship. The commentary on Philippians 2:5-11 will explore each of these aspects of Christ's person and work.

The book of Philippians is not concerned with soteriological issues, such as redemption and justification—issues that are covered in Paul's other writings, especially Romans and Galatians. Rather, the focus is on spiritual maturity, as Paul's opening prayer indicates (1:9-11). He himself was occupied with his pursuit of Christlikeness (1:20-21; 3:7-14), and he urged the Philippians to pursue Christ also (3:15).

OUTLINE

- I. Opening of the Letter (1:1–2:4)
 - A. Greetings from Paul and Timothy (1:1-2)
 - B. Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:3-11)
 - C. Paul's Report about His Situation (1:12-26)
 1. Paul's imprisonment and the proclamation of the Good News (1:12-18)
 2. Paul's desire to live in Christ and magnify him (1:19-26)
 - D. Encouragement to Unity for the Sake of the Good News (1:27–2:4)
- II. The Christ Poem (2:5-11)
- III. Encouragement to Emulate Christ (2:12–3:21)
 - A. Shine for Christ, Be an Offering to God (2:12-18)
 - B. Timothy: An Example of Selflessness (2:19-24)
 - C. Epaphroditus: An Example of Servanthood (2:25-30)
 - D. Encouragement to Rely on Christ (3:1-3)
 - E. Paul: An Example of One Pursuing Christ (3:4-19)
 1. Paul's life before knowing Christ (3:4-6)
 2. Paul's spiritual aspirations (3:7-11)
 3. Paul's pursuit of Christ (3:12-14)
 4. Paul's admonition to follow his example (3:15-19)
 - F. Another Christ Poem (3:20-21)

IV. Closing of the Letter (4:1-23)

A. Appeal to Co-workers (4:1-3)

B. Joy and Peace in Christ (4:4-9)

C. Paul's Thanksgiving for the Philippians' Gift (4:10-20)

D. Paul's Final Greetings (4:21-23)

ENDNOTES

1. The Greek text of UBS⁴ and NA²⁷ for Acts 16:12 reads "a city of the first district of Macedonia," based on blatantly inferior manuscript support: it^c vg^{mss} slav. Not one English version follows this; only the NRSV gives it a marginal note. The superior textual variant is "a leading city of the district of Macedonia," supported by $\text{P}74 \text{ } \times \text{ A C } 044 \text{ } 33$ and followed by almost all modern versions (RSV, NRSV, NASB, NIV, NEB, REB, NAB, NLT). A variant in the TR reads, "the leading city of the district of Macedonia," supported by (B) $\text{P } 049 \text{ } 056 \text{ } 0142 \text{ } \text{M}$ and found in KJV, NKJV, and NJB. The Western text (supported by D it^d syr^p) reads, "capital city of the district of Macedonia." The majority of editors of UBS⁴ and NA²⁷ adopted a reading without any Greek manuscript support because historical evidence doesn't support the fact that Philippi was the principal city of Macedonia or the capital of Macedonia. Thessalonica could make these claims (see Metzger's lengthy discussion in 1994:393-395). However, the Alexandrian manuscripts (whether in the first or second variant) are not implausible because Philippi was "a leading city of the district of Macedonia," though not *the* principal or capital city (there is no definite article in the Greek before *prōtēs* [^{TG4413, ZG4755}]). Furthermore, Philippi could have been called "first city" as a matter of civic pride (so Ascough 1998).

COMMENTARY ON
Philippians

◆ I. Opening of the Letter (1:1–2:4)

A. Greetings from Paul and Timothy (1:1–2)

This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus.

I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus,

1:1 Or *overseers*; or *bishops*.

including the elders* and deacons.

²May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

NOTES

1:1 Paul. He is listed at the head of 13 epistles (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon), sometimes alone (Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus) and at other times with another co-worker or two—namely, Timothy (see below), Sosthenes (1 Corinthians), and Silas (1 and 2 Thessalonians).

Timothy. He is listed as coauthor or co-sender, as in five other epistles (2 Corinthians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Philemon). How much Timothy actually contributed to each epistle is unknown. What we do know is that in 1 and 2 Thessalonians the authors speak in the first person plural (“we”)—with Paul breaking away here and there into the first-person singular (“I, Paul” or “I”), whereas in the Prison Epistles (Philippians, Colossians, Philemon), Timothy is listed as a coauthor or co-sender in the introduction, but then the rest of the epistle is clearly written in first-person singular, signaling the authorship of Paul alone. (Timothy’s status as a co-sender may originate from his role as bearer and interpreter of the letter; see commentary on 2:19–24.)

I am writing. These words are supplied to complete the formula implicit in the Greek. *all of God's holy people . . . who belong to Christ Jesus.* This is a description of all the believers, one that Paul frequently used in the beginning of his epistles.

Philippi. This was a Roman colony in Macedonia, a province in northern Greece. The church in Philippi was the first one established in Greece (see Acts 16:11–40). (For further discussion, see “Audience” in the Introduction.)

including the elders and deacons. Lit., “with overseers and deacons.” In the Greek, it is possible to join together the first two words (*sun* [TG4862, ZG5250] and *episkopois* [TG1985, ZG2176]) and make them one word, *sunepiskopois* [TG4901.1, ZG5297], which means “co-overseers” (or “co-bishops”). This is the reading in some later manuscripts: D² P^{vid} 075 33 1739. Earlier manuscripts could be interpreted either way because no spaces were left between words. However, the sense of the passage is that Paul was writing to the entire church in Philippi, which encompassed “all of God’s holy people,” among whom were the overseers and deacons, who had a special function in the church. It is not clear whether these church leaders were a single group or two distinct groups (as in 1 Tim 3:1–13).

1:2 *May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you.* In the beginning of Paul's Epistles, he asks for a divine blessing on the recipients of his epistle (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phlm 1:3). God the Father is the source of grace and peace, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the giver.

grace. The Greek word *charis* [T⁶5485, Z⁶5921] denotes a gift that gives joy to the receiver. The expression "grace" reflects the traditional Hellenistic greeting (*chairein* [T⁶5463, Z⁶5897])—meaning "good wishes").

peace. The Greek word *eirēnē* [T⁶1515, Z⁶1645] denotes spiritual well-being and contentedness. The expression "peace" reflects the traditional Hebrew greeting (*shalom* [H⁷965, Z^H8934])—meaning "may all be well").

COMMENTARY

In a brief introduction (1:1-2), Paul followed the traditional Hellenistic pattern of letter writing. All letters opened with a prescript, which consisted of three elements: the sender, the recipient, and the salutation (see Weima 2000:642). Thus, all letters followed this pattern: (1) X (in the nominative case); (2) to Y (in the dative case); (3) greetings. An example from the first century illustrates this:

Sarapion to our Heraclides, greeting.
(P. Oxyrhynchus 299, AD 41).

Paul's adaptation of the formula is as follows:

1. Senders: Paul and Timothy
2. Recipients: to all of God's holy people in Philippi . . . including the elders and deacons
3. Greeting: "grace and peace."

Following these three elements, a traditional letter would often have a wish for good health (as in 3 John 1:2) or a thanksgiving formula (as in what follows in 1:3-5) or both.

The senders of the letter to the Philippians identify themselves as "Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus" (1:1). Paul was well known to the Christian church because he contributed the greatest number of writings to what would become the New Testament canon. Timothy also was well known, especially by his association with Paul. As one of Paul's most trusted co-workers, Timothy was with Paul and Silas when they first evangelized Philippi (Acts 16:3, 11). At the time of writing, Paul was hoping to send Timothy back to Philippi in the near future (see 2:19-23).

At the beginning of most of his epistles, Paul called himself an "apostle of Christ Jesus" (see the opening verse in Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy). Philippians 1:1 is the only opening verse where he called himself (and Timothy) a slave of Christ Jesus. (In Titus 1:1, he called himself "a slave of God.") The reason Paul called himself a slave and not a servant is that this accords with what was on Paul's mind in this epistle—namely, that the Son of God, Christ Jesus, became a slave (2:7) as an example for others to follow.

The recipients of this epistle were "all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus" (1:1). This expression denotes three things about the recipients:

(1) They were saints—those set apart by God to be his people; (2) they belonged (lit., “were in”) in Christ Jesus—that is, they were united to Christ by virtue of their faith in him; (3) they, together, constituted the church in a particular city, Philippi. Then, unique among all introductions in Paul’s Epistles, he noted specifically the “elders” (*episkopoi* [T⁶1985, Z⁶2176]) and “deacons” (*diakonoi* [T⁶1249, Z⁶1356]). Who were these individuals? And why did Paul point them out?

The “elders” were church leaders whose qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9. The word came into English versions as “bishop” or sometimes “overseer.” In the New Testament, “bishop,” “overseer,” and “elder” refer to the same office, as shown by the apostle Paul’s instructions to Titus to appoint “elders in each town” and then referring to those same individuals as “overseers” (Titus 1:5, 7; see NLT mg). While at Miletus, Paul summoned the elders from the church at Ephesus and then addressed them as “overseers” (Acts 20:17, 28; see NLT mg). In this letter to the Philippians, Paul greeted the “elders and deacons” (1:1). The fact that there were numerous overseers (bishops) at Philippi as well as in Ephesus shows that the episcopal office had not yet developed into what it later became: a single bishop governing one or more churches (TBD 224). Elders had positions of authority in the local church. One of their tasks was to combat heresy (Titus 1:9) and to teach the Scriptures (1 Tim 3:2). Paul may have singled them out because he expected them to be those mature ones who would properly pass on Paul’s teachings to the church (3:15).

The word “deacon” was used by biblical writers in a general sense to describe someone engaged in various ministries or services. Not until later in the development of church leadership was the term applied to a distinct body of church officers. Among its general usages “deacon” refers to a waiter at meals (John 2:5, 9), a king’s attendant (Matt 22:13), a minister of God (2 Cor 6:4), a servant of Christ (2 Cor 11:23), a servant of the church (Col 1:24-25), and even a political servant of state (Rom 13:4). By the time the church of Philippi received its instructions from Paul, the term “deacon” seems to have become a technical term referring to a specific office in the church (TBD 363-364). In 1 Timothy 3:8-13 instructions are given about qualifications for the office of deacon. First Timothy 3:11 states that the women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate and faithful in all things. This may refer not to deacons’ wives but to female deacons, as several translations note (NIV, NEB; see also NLT mg). In any event, it is clear that women served as deacons. For example, Paul commended Phoebe for her service in the church at Cenchrea, using the word “deaconess” to describe her (Rom 16:1). He praised her as a helper (Rom 16:2), a word that denotes leadership qualities (cf. Rom 12:8; 1 Tim 3:4-5). We know from sources outside the New Testament that women served important positions in the church and that some were deacons. Writing in the early second century, Pliny the Younger (a governor of Bithynia), in his correspondence with Trajan verified women officeholders in the church and mentioned two deaconesses who were martyred for the cause of Christ (see *Letters* 96.1-9).

As for the Epistle to the Philippians, it seems that Paul specifically mentioned

“deacons” because servanthood was on his mind when he wrote this epistle. An attitude of servanthood—like that demonstrated by Christ (2:5-11)—is the key to church unity. It is possible that Euodia and Syntyche (4:2) were deaconesses, who had influential roles in the church at Philippi. They, needing unification, could attain this by taking on the servant’s mind as exhibited in Christ.

◆ B. Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:3-11)

³Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. ⁴Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, ⁵for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. ⁶And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.

⁷So it is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a special place in my heart. You share with me the special favor of God, both in my imprisonment and in defending and confirming

the truth of the Good News. ⁸God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

⁹I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. ¹⁰For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ’s return. ¹¹May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ*—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

1:11 Greek *with the fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ*.

NOTES

1:3 *Every time I think of you.* Lit., “at every remembrance of you.” This can be rendered “every time I remember you” or “every remembrance of yours [for me].” The first is the most natural reading; the second is possible. If Paul was thanking them for remembering him, this links with 1:5, where he also thanked them for their participation in the gospel.

I give thanks to my God. As noted above, one of the elements often found in the prescript of Hellenistic letters was a word of thanksgiving offered to a god. Paul offered his thanksgiving to “my God”—the God he knew personally.

1:5 *for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ.* Lit., “for your fellowship in the gospel.” The Greek word underlying “fellowship” is *koinōnia* [1^o2842, 2^o3126]; depending on the context, it can denote one’s fellowship with Christ or one’s fellowship with other believers, or it can have the notion of “sharing” and “generosity” (as in Phlm 1:6). Paul was thanking God for the Philippians’ spiritual partnership, as well as their financial support (see 4:10-20).

1:6 *God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished.* Although Hawthorne (1983:21) sees “the good work” as referring to the Philippians’ partnership in the gospel (1:5), the words extend beyond this to encompass the entirety of God’s work of grace (Martin 1987:63). This is a wonderful promise because it indicates that God takes the initiative to transform each believer into the likeness of his Son (see Rom 8:29; Eph 4:13-15).

on the day when Christ Jesus returns. When Christ returns, the believers will receive the ultimate act in the work of transformation—namely, the transfiguration of their bodies in conformity to Christ’s body (3:20-21).

1:7 for you have a special place in my heart. The Greek here is ambiguous inasmuch as either *me* [T^G1473, Z^G1609] (me) or *humas* [T^G4571, Z^G5148] (you all) could be the subject of the infinitive, “to have.” The phrase can be rendered as “because I have you in my heart” (so NLT) or “because you have me in your heart” (so NRSV). Both are contextually defensible.

defending and confirming. The language suggests a legal defense. Indeed, both Greek words suggest this. The first (*apologia* [T^G627, Z^G665]) is obvious, but even the second (*bebaiōsei* [T^G951, Z^G1012]) was typically used in first-century papyri in the technical sense of affirming truth by legal means (MM 108). Paul was ready to make a defense before the courts and in so doing defend the gospel.

1:8 God knows. In most manuscripts, the Greek reads, “God is my witness.” The NLT seems to accord with $\text{P}46$ and its, which have the shortest reading here: “God is witness.” However, since $\text{P}46$ is known for its accidental omissions, its testimony in such cases cannot be regarded too highly (Silva 1992:57).

long for you with the tender compassion of Christ. The Greek behind “tender compassion” (*splanchnois* [T^G4698, Z^G5073]) refers to the viscera. Greeks considered the deepest emotions to derive from the viscera (bowels, entrails), just as modern Americans think the deepest emotions come from the heart (BDAG 938).

1:9 I pray that your love will overflow more and more. The object of this love is not stated. Lightfoot (1976:86) notes that this love is “neither towards the Apostle alone nor towards one another alone, but love absolutely, the inward state of the soul.”

knowledge and understanding. The first term *epignōsei* [T^G1922, Z^G2106] had “become almost a technical term for the decisive knowledge of God” (TDNT 1.707). The second term (*aisthēsei* [T^G144, Z^G151]) denotes “insight” and “perception.” In short, Paul was praying that the believers would increase in their knowledge of God and spiritual insight.

1:10 I want you to understand what really matters. This is a functionally equivalent translation of the Greek, which reads “so that you can approve the things that are superior.” The notion of approving indicates that the believers were to “put [things] to the test,” and then as a result of such examination, “to accept as tested, to approve.” The object of the verb here may be rendered as “the things which differ.” Martin (1987:67) says the meaning here was derived from contemporary popular philosophy and is “the things which really matter.”

that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ’s return. The Greek word for “pure” (*eilikrineis* [T^G1506, Z^G1637]) probably derived etymologically from the notion of judged (cf. *krinō* [T^G2920, Z^G3213]) in the sunlight (*eilē*; cf. *hēlios* [T^G2246, Z^G2463]). The word was first used to depict a person bringing an object into the sunlight to see if it was spotless. The usage then moved from the physical realm to the moral realm and was used to denote moral purity. The Greek word behind “blameless” (*aproskopoi* [T^G677, Z^G718]) denotes “not causing someone else to stumble” or “avoiding anything that would cause one to stumble.”

1:11 May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ. Lit., “may you be filled with the fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ.” Since the Philippians (as all Christians) were already made right with God by faith in Christ, this prayer must be for the Philippians to live out a life of righteousness by virtue of their union with Jesus Christ.

much glory and praise to God. This has excellent textual support: \aleph A B D² I 044 \aleph it syr cop. There are a few interesting textual variants, however: (1) “glory and praise of Christ” in D*; (2) “my [Paul’s] glory and praise” in F G; (3) “glory of God and my [Paul’s] praise” in $\text{P}46$ (its). The reading followed by the NLT is common biblical terminology, found in OT passages such as 2 Sam 22:50; Pss 35:28; 41:13. Thus, it is possible that Paul drew from

such sources when he concluded his prayer with the phrase, “glory and praise to God.” The first variant involves a simple change from “God” to “Christ.” But the next two variants are difficult to explain—either on transcriptional grounds or exegetical. Thus, it is possible that Paul originally wrote what was in the second or third variants. But the second variant, which omits “of God,” looks like a scribal attempt to avoid a close juxtaposition between God and Paul (Silva 1992:64). The third variant, found in the earliest manuscript, P⁴⁶, may preserve the original—not only on transcriptional grounds but also on exegetical. It was characteristic of Paul, when speaking of the Lord’s return (see 1:10), to mention that the believers’ transformed lives would bring glory to God and honor to Paul (see 2:16; 2 Cor 1:14; 1 Thess 2:19-20). Thus, it would not be too much for Paul to say that the Philippians would bring God glory and Paul praise (see Comfort 2008:[Phil 1:11]).

COMMENTARY

One of the usual practices of letter writing in Hellenistic times was for the writer to offer prayer and/or thanksgiving to a god or gods for the recipients of his letter. The two following examples illustrate this:

Isias to her brother Hephaisition, [greeting]. If you are well and other things are going right, it would accord with the prayer which I make continually to the gods (*Greek Historical Documents*, 235. Translator, R. S. Bagnall; 168 BC).

Aurelius Dius to Aurelius Horion, my sweetest father, many greetings. I make supplication for you every day before the gods of this place (P. Oxyrhynchus 1296, third century AD).

Adapting this custom in the prescript to the Philippians, Paul offered his thanksgiving and prayer to the one true God manifest in Christ Jesus, the God he personally knew, calling him “my God.” Then Paul told the Philippians how often he prayed for them, why he prayed for them, and what he prayed for them.

Paul gave thanks for the Philippians every time he thought of them (1:3). They had been his partners in advancing the Good News about Christ ever since he first brought this Good News to them (1:5). Paul was confident that their good beginning would lead to a good end inasmuch as God is the originator of faith as well as its completer (1:6). This expression—completing what one has begun—is a major theme in this epistle. On one hand, God is responsible for completing in the believers what he began, for it is his goal to conform every believer to the image of his Son, Jesus Christ (Rom 8:28-30). On the other hand, it is the believer’s responsibility to cooperate with God so that this work can be made complete. Paul highlights the two aspects of this symbiotic relationship in 2:12-13, where he tells the Philippians to “work hard to show the results of your salvation” and then immediately says “for God is working in you.” The work of spiritual transformation is a lifelong process beginning with regeneration, continuing with the process of being made like Jesus both in his sufferings and his resurrection (3:10), and concluding with transfiguration, wherein the body is made like Jesus’ glorified body (3:21).

In the next section (1:7-8), Paul elaborates on his heartfelt affection for the Philippians as well as their affection for him (see note on 1:7). He loved them so much that he was longing to see them and be with them (see 1:25; 2:24). The Philippians

and Paul had shared in God's grace. As Paul suffered for the gospel and they joined with him in his suffering so they also joined with him in his enjoyment of God's grace (see 1:29, where Paul speaks of their suffering for Christ as a privilege of God's grace). Paul's suffering had extended to imprisonment, where he would continue to defend and confirm the truth of the Good News. As explained in the note above on 1:8, the language suggests that Paul was ready to make a legal defense, wherein he would verify the truth of the Good News. This defense would be made before the imperial court (see 2 Tim 4:16) or before a provincial judge (cf. Acts 25:16), depending on where one places Paul's imprisonment when he wrote Philippians (see "Date and Occasion" in the Introduction).

The content of Paul's prayer is related in 1:9-11. This opening prayer provides a window into Paul's desire for the Philippians' spiritual life, and it also provides a précis for the themes Paul will develop later in the epistle. Those who study Paul's Epistles know that his opening prayers function this way for each of his writings. In Paul's prayer for the Philippians, he focused on two aspects in which he wanted to see growth: (1) their love for Christ and/or for one another (see note on 1:9), which would promote a serving, cooperative spirit, leading to true unity; and (2) their understanding and discernment of spiritual pursuits, such that they would value the pursuit of knowing Christ as being the best aspiration. This understanding of "what really matters" would come as the result of testing spiritual things and approving what is best (see note on 1:10). Paul himself had done this, as he testified in 3:4-11, and he had come to the conclusion that all things pale in comparison to knowing Christ personally and experientially.

The pursuit of love and of knowing Christ produces pure and blameless lives (see note on 1:10). To be pure and blameless means that Christians are faultless as to their own morality and faultless as to the way they treat others. Such lives will put people in good light on the day when Christ returns. Such lives cannot be attained by human effort alone; they are the fruit—the result—of one's salvation, wherein the righteousness of Christ is lived out in daily life. Such lives, Paul teaches, are the result of human–divine cooperation, wherein God is the originator and sustainer of a living salvation and the believer is the active receiver and participant. Such lives bring much glory and praise to God, which is the ultimate purpose of human existence.

◆ C. Paul's Report about His Situation (1:12-26)

1. Paul's imprisonment and the proclamation of the Good News (1:12-18)

¹²And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters,* that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. ¹³For everyone here, including the whole palace guard,* knows

that I am in chains because of Christ. ¹⁴And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers* here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message* without fear.



Colossians

PETER H. DAVIDS

INTRODUCTION TO *Colossians*

COLOSSIANS IS A FASCINATING BOOK that is often neglected, with the exception of Colossians 1:15-20. In the English Bible it comes last in the Prison Epistles (Ephesians through Colossians) because it is the shortest of them. Pauline letters were arranged by length, not by date, theme, or geographical location as we might have done today. Ephesians is, therefore, often preferred over Colossians because it is longer—i.e., it has expanded sections on some of the very topics that Colossians discusses. Furthermore, because the Pauline Epistles are arranged from longest to shortest, Colossians is separated by the Thessalonian letters and the Pastoral Epistles from its companion letter, Philemon, which was probably written about the same time (Paul references nearly the same cast of characters in Philemon as he does in Colossians). This separation often causes the two letters to be read separately rather than together, which would give a more detailed context to both.

The comparative neglect of Colossians, however, is unjustified. There is no other letter in the Pauline corpus that exalts Christ more. Indeed, the main section about Christ (1:15-20) is often lifted from Colossians and studied separately as if it were a doctrinal treatise. However, Paul's purpose for the inclusion of this hymnic section is not to talk about Christ in the abstract. Instead, he wrote about Christ in order to draw some very practical implications for the life of the church. One's view of Christ determines the way one lives. Therefore, when Colossians is read as a whole—as Paul wrote it—it becomes a very practical guide to living a healthy Christian life.

AUTHOR

It seems clear from the very first verse of Colossians (1:1) that Paul of Tarsus, the much-traveled missionary, was the author. Furthermore, the structure of the letter, including the rhetoric, is very similar to those letters that almost everyone accepts as being written by Paul (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians, the so-called "main letters" or *Hauptbriefe*). The letter also has indications of a similar cultural and historical context as Philemon, which scholars rarely dispute as a genuine letter of Paul as well. For example, the colleagues of Paul sending greetings in Philemon closely parallel those sending greetings in Colossians. However, while the authorship of Colossians is not as disputed as that of Ephesians or the Pastoral Epistles, it is contested by a significant number of scholars (Lohse 1968:249-257; Ehrman 2000:346-350; Perkins 1988:194; Freed 1986:318-320). Such notable opposition to the letter's Pauline authorship requires that we investigate the reasons for such opposition.

First, it has been asserted against Pauline authorship (Lohse 1973; several of the essays in Francis and Meeks 1973; cf. the summary in O'Brien 1982) that Colossians differs in style, vocabulary, theology (principally Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology), and background (in its use of Gnostic traditions) from the genuine Pauline letters. It must be admitted that in Colossians, a letter in which the underlying problem involves Jewish piety being recommended to gentile believers, it is surprising that some of the key language of Romans and Galatians (e.g., "sin," "righteousness," "salvation," "believe," "justify," and "justification") do not appear. It is also striking how much of the vocabulary of Colossians overlaps with that of Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles rather than with that of admittedly genuine Pauline letters, although this is significant only if one has already decided on other grounds that Ephesians and the Pastorals were *not* written by Paul. It is also clear that the style, principally the grammar, of Colossians is different in some respects from Romans, Galatians, or the Corinthians literature. Yet having pointed out these problems, the issue remains as to whether these differences are significant enough to demand that we posit authorship by someone other than Paul. Let us examine this question as concisely as possible.

Admittedly there is a greater emphasis in Colossians on the cosmic aspects of Christology (i.e., Christ as creator and Lord of the universe), a more universal view of the church, and less of an emphasis on futuristic eschatology than in the Pauline works used for comparison. However, none of the themes found in Colossians is entirely missing from those earlier works, nor are the perspectives of those works entirely missing from Colossians. The difference is only a matter of emphasis. To draw a black-and-white picture of contrast between Colossians and earlier Pauline literature is misleading.

Recognizing that there are differences of language in Colossians, one needs to ask whether and, if so, how much Colossians was influenced by the terms and concepts that were current in the Colossian situation. Could it be that Paul was well informed about that situation (i.e., that Epaphras and others had given him a detailed report) and was in dialogue with the various terms and ideas that were circulating in Colosse? Likewise, one's evaluation of the traditions being addressed in Colossians—such as, whether they were Gnostic (and therefore to be dated later) or Jewish (and therefore possibly earlier)—depends on one's perspective on the issue of date and the issue of the meaning of the possible Colossian slogans that Paul uses. There is certainly no exposition of Gnostic thought or of mystery religion rites in Colossians just as there is no exposition of Jewish piety. One must take the clues from the text and construct a model and compare that model to various possible backgrounds. Needless to say, many scholars do not see a mystery religion and/or Gnostic background that is seemingly apparent to some of those who deny Pauline authorship. Could it be that these backgrounds are more a projection into the text than a convincing picture arising out of the text?

Various scholars (Bruce 1984; O'Brien 1982) have defended Pauline authorship. On the question of vocabulary, these scholars argue that if Paul was indeed respond-

ing to the issues current in Colosse, then it is to be expected that his vocabulary be shaped by the key words used in that context. Paul was quite capable of taking the terms of those he opposed and inserting them into his own arguments so as to turn them to his service. We see this phenomenon in both the Corinthian correspondence and Galatians. What we may be seeing in Colossians is Paul's creativity and flexibility in using Colossian terms, not evidence against his authorship. It might, however, be objected that there is no evidence that Paul takes his style from those with whom he corresponds. Yet are the stylistic differences from his other letters significant enough to warrant that Paul could not have written this letter? To answer that question would require a detailed discussion of the Greek text, which is beyond the scope of this commentary. A brief discussion and references to the relevant literature may be found in deSilva 2004. In any case, it seems there are better answers to the objections based on stylistic differences than there are by attributing the whole letter to another author.

Regarding the Christology of Colossians, I have already noted that the issue is one of emphasis more than absolute difference. Thus the question is more, "Could there be something in the Colossian situation that led Paul to focus more on a Christology that stresses Christ as the Lord of the universe and less on futuristic eschatology?" In none of his letters was Paul a slave to his own thought, having to compulsively reproduce his key ideas, but rather he was in dialogue with the thought of others, searching out the best strategies to correct or modify it without losing the people with whom he was in dialogue. That is why in Colossians, as virtually everywhere in his correspondence, he relied more on persuasion than on authority. If, then, Paul was cognizant of and dialoguing with the background of those to whom he wrote and was using concepts from the world in which he and they were living, what is the probable background of Colossians? While many earlier scholars and a number of more recent ones favored models involving Gnostic thought patterns that developed decades after Paul's martyrdom, much recent scholarship favors models involving thought patterns with which Paul was very much at home—that is, some form of Jewish spirituality rather than Gnostic speculation or mystery cult initiation. These Jewish models for the background of Colossians fit quite well within Paul's lifetime, which is significant for authorship since it is usually assumed that if Paul did not write Colossians, it was written well after his martyrdom.

In responding to the issues raised by those who find Pauline authorship unconvincing, a counter objection can be raised: Why would a pseudonymous author produce a letter to Colosse? While it had been large, Colosse was declining during Paul's day, having been overshadowed by Laodicea and Hierapolis, which had become, respectively, the major commercial-judicial and healing destinations in the area during the first century. Furthermore, since pseudonymous authorship demands a post-Pauline date, the apparent fact that Colosse was heavily damaged or destroyed in an earthquake in AD 60–61 (i.e., before Paul was martyred) and seems never to have been prominent after that would make it a less likely destination for a pseudonymous letter (O'Brien 1982:xxvi; Dunn 1996:20-21). Paul never visited Colosse, so it was not a city associated with his ministry. What would be the purpose of creating a

Pauline letter to this city? Finally, the list of names in the greetings, eight of which also occur in Philemon, also seems to serve no purpose if the letter were not genuine. Theories of pseudepigraphy have yet to come up with a convincing reason for why someone would create this letter ostensibly addressed to a then-unimportant city that Paul was never known to have visited rather than a letter to Antioch or Berea or Athens or some other city more directly associated with the Pauline mission.

Having raised questions about theories of pseudonymity, there is yet another position on the authorship question that needs to be explored. There are a number of scholars who argue that the stylistic and theological evidence is strong enough that one should consider the possibility that while Paul was indeed alive and associated with the letter, it was actually crafted by one of his associates (i.e., Timothy) rather than by Paul himself. This could have come about because Paul's circumstances in prison did not allow him enough freedom for dictating a letter (see Dunn 1996:38) or because the associate had the personal contact with Colosse that Paul lacked. The function of this model is to explain the differences between Colossians and the main Pauline letters, as well as the numerous similarities between Colossians and those letters. In particular, this model handles the issue of stylistic differences well, for unlike vocabulary and theology, style and thus stylistic difference are unconscious and not related to subject matter. Yet, attractive as this theory is, this remains a model, one way of putting the data together. Timothy was indeed a cowriter with Paul of Colossians, but he was also a cowriter with him of 2 Corinthians (see 2 Cor 1:1, a form of wording close to that in Colossians) and Philippians (Phil 1:1, where he is even more closely tied to Paul), and, along with Silas, a cowriter of 1 and 2 Thessalonians as well. If all of these were coauthored by Paul and Timothy, then why is the style of Colossians different from that of 2 Corinthians? Of course, it is quite possible that Timothy had more or less freedom in his composition, depending on how involved Paul could be with the writing process due to his prisoner status and how involved Timothy had been with the church in question. Yet we have no way to validate or discredit this theory in any given situation. We do not know how much freedom Paul would have given someone like Timothy by the time Colossians was written. Nor do we have independent examples of Timothy's style to compare with Colossians. Thus, this is an attractive possibility that explains some of the problems encountered by pure Pauline authorship (which the letter does not claim) and avoids the problems encountered by theories of pseudonymous authorship, but it is a possibility that cannot be proved based on current literary and historical evidence.

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

The date of Colossians is dependent upon two things. First, if one has decided that Paul is not the author, then Colossians was almost certainly written after his death, with some scholars placing it in the 70s (Lohse 1968, 1973; Ehrman 2000). If one has decided that Paul was the author, then it must have been written before AD 68 (per tradition and the date of Nero's death). There is, as I noted above, one alternative that dates the letter to Paul's lifetime (or possibly shortly after) but without

pure Pauline authorship. Dunn (1996:38) suggests that the best hypothesis is that the letter was written about the same time as Philemon, although by one of Paul's colleagues (perhaps Timothy) rather than by Paul himself.

Second, assuming that Colossians was composed during Paul's lifetime, one still has a range of possible dates. The clearest chronological data in the letter is that Paul was in prison (4:3, 18). Paul himself wrote that he had "been put in prison more often" than other Christian workers (2 Cor 11:23; cf. 6:5), and he wrote this *before* the only two longer imprisonments that we know about—namely, those in Caesarea and Rome, so there were obviously a lot of imprisonments about which we have no information. Traditionally, for most biblical scholars the choice of Paul's imprisonments during the writing of Colossians has been Rome because there is a preference for a known imprisonment over an unknown one. This choice has not been universal, since, for example, Reicke (2001:75-78) states categorically that it was written in Caesarea. The advantage to accepting Caesarea is that it places Paul in closer proximity (500 mi or 800 km) to his ministry in the Roman province of Asia, where Colosse was located, than locating Paul at Rome does (900 mi or 1450 km), and the trip to Caesarea could be made by land (a slave, such as Onesimus, might find it difficult to pay for a sea journey). The disadvantage to placing this imprisonment in Caesarea is in trying to explain why Trophimus, who was with Paul in Jerusalem just prior to his imprisonment in Caesarea, is not mentioned in either Colossians or Philemon, and also why Tychicus, Mark, and Epaphras are not said to have been with Paul in Jerusalem or Caesarea. In its favor is the fact that Luke (if he is the "we" voice in Acts, which is debatable) and Aristarchus, both mentioned as sending greetings in Colossians 4, were with Paul in Caesarea. However, since another "we" passage suggests they also accompanied him to Rome (Acts 27:1-2), they would have been with him there as well.

Other scholars have suggested that Paul could well have been imprisoned within Roman Asia, probably in Ephesus, and that this location, with its proximity to Colosse (100 mi or 160 km), would explain both Colossians and Philemon better than other possible locations (see Martin 1973). The proximity of an Ephesian imprisonment explains why Paul would write to Colosse, a city he had never visited. Moreover, an Ephesian setting makes the journeys required by the book of Philemon more understandable (Philemon was probably written just before or perhaps just after Colossians; see the Introduction to Philemon). Considering the journeys and the cast of characters who are with Paul (Aristarchus and Paul were arrested together in Ephesus [Acts 19:29], and in 4:10 he is described as a fellow prisoner), Ephesus makes the most sense. Considering the developed Christology, Rome would make significant sense, for why would the Christology of Colossians not also appear in Romans and perhaps 2 Corinthians if Colossians was written before Romans—unless one thinks that this Christology was not appropriate to the subject matter of Romans and 2 Corinthians?

Caesarea forms a mediating solution in that Paul's two-year-plus imprisonment there comes after the writing of Romans, and it is not impossible to envisage the travel

presupposed in Philemon and Colossians if Paul were in Caesarea. Still, while not impossible, it is difficult to envision someone like Onesimus heading to Caesarea (a month-long trip by foot) unless he knew Paul was there and was purposefully looking for him. Furthermore, it is difficult to envision Paul planning to leave Caesarea and travel to the small, declining city of Colosse, when we know that his previously announced plan had been to travel to Rome and then on to Spain (Rom 15:24). Thus, the probabilities still point to Ephesus or Rome, the latter only due to tradition and the high Christology. The interpretation of the letter does not depend upon which one is chosen. However, in my view, Ephesus makes better historical sense, given the journeys of Onesimus required to explain Philemon, including the probability that Onesimus carried the letter to Philemon and the certainty that Onesimus was with Paul when Colossians was written and would help carry the letter to the Colossians (which was probably at a different time than Philemon because of differences, as noted above, in who was and was not in prison—see Introduction to Philemon).

The reason why the letter was written is much clearer than the issue of where the letter was written. Paul writes “so no one will deceive you with well-crafted arguments” (2:4). Some person or persons were trying to persuade the Colossians of ideas and practices that neither came from nor were in conformity with their commitment to be followers of Jesus Christ, but instead these ideas were “empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking” (2:8). What these empty philosophies may have been will be discussed below under “Theological Concerns.”

AUDIENCE

To find the audience of Colossians we need to travel south from Ephesus over a ridge that separates it from Magnesia on the Meander River. Then we travel more or less eastward up the Meander River until we come to the point, just over 60 miles or 100 kilometers inland, where the Lycus River enters it. At this point, turn south up the Lycus River, where we would first come to Laodicea and then to Colosse. The audience of Colossians was the Christian house churches in Colosse and elsewhere (4:16) in the Lycus Valley. We know that at least Colosse and Laodicea had a believing community, but we do not know whether they were the only cities in the area with house churches, although that seems to be the case because Hierapolis, another significant city of the area (situated across from Laodicea on the north side of the Lycus), is not mentioned as receiving a letter from Paul (nor is it mentioned among the churches addressed in Revelation 1–3). Paul himself had not evangelized the Lycus Valley, and while he may have passed through it on this third missionary journey (or further north through the Cayster River valley), he certainly did not stop in Colosse (2:1). Had he come through the area, he probably would have gone to Laodicea, for while Colosse had been a large city in the centuries before Christ, by the time of Paul Laodicea was more significant and the seat of government for the whole region. Colosse was by then a smaller city and in decline. It was damaged and perhaps destroyed by one or possibly two earthquakes during the time of Paul’s ministry, the one certain earthquake occurring in AD 60–61

new element for a Pauline letter, that is, a hymnic recounting first of the greatness of the Father and then of Christ. This is the standard against which all that Paul discusses will be measured. The thanksgiving, prayer, and praise serve together as the introduction, or *exordium*, the first part of a Greco-Roman argument. The argument would continue with a narration (often a setting out of facts), a *propositio* (thesis statement), an exposition (expansion of the implications of the *propositio*) or *probatio* (argument for the truth of the *propositio*), and sometimes concluding with a *peroratio* (summation and conclusion; but not here). As is argued below, Paul had a decent basic Greek education, and his letters show his ability to use Greek rhetorical forms.

Having completed his introduction (*exordium*; 1:3-23), Paul then sets out the facts of his relationship with the Colossians (*narratio*: 1:24-2:5), culminating in his thematic statement (*propositio*; 2:6-7). But such a statement needs to be further explored and its implications worked out. In 2:8-4:6 we have more of an exposition (*expositio*) than an argument (*probatio*), but the object is clear: If one accepts the truths of the *exordium*, then the arguments and practice of the Hellenistic Jewish teachers are untenable. The implications of this argument are worked out—first in terms of practices being urged on the Colossians, and then in terms of an ethical lifestyle. These together form the body of the letter. After the closing of the body of the letter, Paul finishes Colossians with the last part of the letter structure—the conclusion, consisting of a commendation of the messenger, greetings, and a final autographed request and blessing.

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. Introduction (*exordium*)(1:3-23)
 - A. Thanksgiving (1:3-8)
 - B. Prayer for the Colossians (1:9-12)
 - C. Praise to the Father and Son for Salvation (1:13-23)
- III. Historical Background (*narratio*) (1:24-2:5)
- IV. Thematic Statement (*propositio*): The Way In Is the Way On, and That Way Is Christ (2:6-7)
- V. Exposition of the Theme (*expositio*) (2:8-4:6)
 - A. Theological Implications of the Theme (2:8-23)
 1. Christ is all sufficient (2:8-15)
 2. Christ, not religious practices and rule (2:16-19)
 3. Christ, not Jewish purity (2:20-23)
 - B. Ethical Implications of the Theme (3:1-4:6)
 1. General statement (3:1-4)
 2. Specific vices and virtues (3:5-17)
 3. The Christian household (3:18-4:1)
 4. Concerning prayer and concluding summary (4:2-6)
- VI. Conclusion (4:7-18)

COMMENTARY ON *Colossians*

◆ I. Salutation (1:1-2)

This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy.

the city of Colosse, who are faithful brothers and sisters* in Christ.

²We are writing to God's holy people in

May God our Father give you grace and peace.

1:2 Greek *faithful brothers*.

NOTES

1:1 *chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.* Paul cited his appointment as an apostle of Jesus in all of his letters except Philippians, the two Thessalonian letters, and Philemon. 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1 (with a slight difference); and 2 Tim 1:1 exactly parallel the expression found here. Paul said that Jesus appointed him as his delegate following God's will.

our brother Timothy. Timothy is joined with Paul as a coauthor in the salutation here, as also in 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Phlm 1:1. He is called a "brother" whenever Paul uses a title for himself that does not fit Timothy (in this case "apostle," elsewhere "prisoner").

1:2 *God's holy people.* Paul often referred to Christians as "holy people" (traditionally, "saints"). See Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1. In this they are the renewed Israel, picking up on the statement in Exod 19:6 that Israel would be a holy nation (so also Pss 16:3; 34:9; cf. 1 Pet 2:9). This means that they had been set apart for God, something that happens in conversion. For example, the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:2; 6:11) had been sanctified (i.e., made holy—the Greek root is the same as the expression used here) in Jesus, even though as a group they were not living what Paul considered godly lives. Their calling as the renewed Israel was nevertheless a fact of their existence. It was a stated fact, and the command to live appropriately is consequently the imperative in Paul's letter.

faithful. While Paul often speaks of people having faith, it is rare that he speaks of them as faithful. Normally, it is God who is described as faithful (e.g., 1 Cor 1:9; 10:13; 2 Cor 1:18), but at times Timothy (1 Cor 4:17), Tychicus (4:7; Eph 6:21), Epaphras (1:7), or Onesimus (4:9) are described as faithful. Only here and in Eph 1:1 is a whole church called faithful, perhaps because Paul viewed them as having remained true to Christ, needing warning and encouragement, but not correction.

COMMENTARY

Colossians opens with a very typical Pauline greeting (1:1). Paul identifies himself as an apostle or delegate of Christ Jesus, which means that he was personally appointed by Christ to represent him in a given area under certain conditions. Paul understood the area to include all lands from Jerusalem north and west through

Asia Minor to and including the Balkan Peninsula, so long as no one else had founded churches there (Rom 15:18-21). However, by the time Paul wrote Romans, he believed Christ was expanding the mandate to include Spain (Rom 15:22-24). Yet despite his personal commission from Jesus, Paul almost never worked alone. He almost always had a team of apprentices and co-workers around him, which he included in his ministry. In this case, as in five other letters, Timothy was his main co-worker, presented as the coauthor of the letter. Timothy was surely known by the Colossian church, for he had been with Paul on and off during his somewhat long ministry in Ephesus. Perhaps Timothy had even visited Colosse (he had certainly visited Corinth during this period; 1 Cor 4:17). Timothy was not an apostle in the same sense that Paul was, for Christ did not personally delegate him, but he was chosen by Paul as a colleague; he was also a brother, as were the Colossian believers. As reflected in this letter, when Paul thought of his apostleship, he stressed God's choice of him. That is, Paul did not volunteer to be Christ's delegate nor did he earn the right to be a delegate. Rather, he was fully aware that he had been a persecutor of the church and so was responsible for the death of Christians when God chose him (1 Cor 15:9; we do not know whether he ever personally killed a Christian; Acts 22:20 presents him as encouraging and assisting those who killed Stephen). Paul never lost sight of the fact that it was God's choice that made him a delegate of Christ, not his own choice or merit or training.

Paul addressed his letter to God's holy (or set apart) people in Colossians (1:2). Paul did not view the church as different from Judaism, so he freely appropriated for Christians the titles of Israel in the Old Testament. They, even the gentile converts, were those people whom God had set apart for himself. The distinctive characteristic of this group of Christians is that they are faithful, a group that is true to Christ. Therefore, this is not a group that Paul will have to call back to Christ but one that has remained firm, even if their devotion might leave them in danger of being taken in by teaching that claimed to show them a deeper or more rigorous way of following Christ. The danger will be mentioned later; at this point Paul simply pointed out their outstanding commitment. Just as Timothy was a brother, so also were they ("brothers and sisters" translating the collective plural of the term used for Timothy), and just as their leader Epaphras was faithful so also were they.

Paul closed his salutation with his typical blessing or prayer, "May God our Father give you grace and peace," which would be an appropriate way for Christians in any age to bless each other. The phrase itself is a combination of a play on the normal Greek greeting (*chairein* [T⁶5463, Z⁶5897], as in Jas 1:1, which sounds something like *charis* [T⁶5485, Z⁶5921], or "grace,") and the Hebrew greeting of *shalom*, which translates as *eirēnē* [T⁶1515, Z⁶1645] in Greek. It was a Christian greeting used not only by Paul but also by Peter and John (1 and 2 Pet, 2 John, Rev) and thus picks up God's goal through the ages of *shalom* for his people and combines it with the distinctly New Testament sense of having favor or grace from God. Its frequent use, however, could mean that it had become a stereotyped expression of the community, which was no longer conscious of its theological background.

◆ II. Introduction (*exordium*) (1:3-23)

A. Thanksgiving (1:3-8)

³We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people, ⁵which come from your confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven. You have had this expectation ever since you first heard the truth of the Good News.

⁶This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is bear-

ing fruit everywhere by changing lives, just as it changed your lives from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace.

⁷You learned about the Good News from Epaphras, our beloved co-worker. He is Christ's faithful servant, and he is helping us on your behalf.* ⁸He has told us about the love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you.

1:7 Or *he is ministering on your behalf*; some manuscripts read *he is ministering on our behalf*.

NOTES

1:3 *God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* This is the reading of $\text{P}^{61\text{vid}} \text{B C}^* 1739$ (D F G add a definite article before "Father"). A number of mss have "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" ($\text{K}^{\text{A}} \text{C}^2 \text{D}^1 \text{I} 044 33 \text{M}$), which would conform the text to common Pauline usage (cf. NASB for Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3, 17; cf. also 1 Pet 1:3). The diversity of the manuscript evidence as well as the fact that it is the more difficult reading favors the reading behind the NLT. What is clear is that Paul, following the pattern of Jewish monotheism, normally prays to God, not to Jesus, nor does he freely refer to Jesus as God. However, for him God is not just the God of Moses but the God whom Jesus Christ revealed to his followers as Father. God is Father of Jesus in that Jesus embodies Israel (Isa 63:16; 64:8) and truly took his identity, authority, and supply from God (the functions that a father fulfilled in an ancient family). Furthermore, that means that they form a family into which followers of Jesus can be integrated.

1:4 *faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people.* The faith/love pair is seen elsewhere in Paul's writings (1 Cor 13:2, 13; Gal 5:6; Eph 1:15; 3:17; 1 Thess 1:3; 3:6; 5:8, etc.). Here, as in Ephesians, the faith is "in Christ Jesus." Most commentators argue that this indicates the sphere in which their faith operates, that is, they have faith [in God] in the context of being in Christ (Wall 1993:44-45; Bruce 1984:41; Moule 1968:49). While this is possible, it seems more likely that Paul was speaking about commitment to Christ (*pistis* [^{T64102}, ^{Z64411}]) because the verb *pisteuō* [^{T64100}, ^{Z64409}] indicates commitment when followed by an object rather than a "that." For Paul, too, *pistis* is always "faith in someone" since it is logical that the object of commitment would parallel the object of love (so Dunn 1996:57)—i.e., that "Christ Jesus" is the object of "faith" as "all of God's people" is the object of "love." "Love" does not indicate how they felt about "all of God's people" but how they acted toward them (i.e., lovingly), as is typical in the NT.

1:5 *confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven.* Hope is often linked with faith and love in Paul's writings (1 Cor 13:13; Gal 5:5-6; 1 Thess 1:3; 5:8). Here the hope is eschatological (i.e., a heavenly reward) as the "reserved for you" shows (used in a negative eschatological context in Luke 19:20, but positively in 2 Tim 4:8). What is unusual here in Paul is that faith comes from hope, although it makes sense when we understand "hope" not as something "hoped for" (being unsure of the outcome) but as something expected. The NLT translation, "confident hope," is quite fitting. It is easy to see how this expectation would birth commitment to Christ and the concomitant love for believers. Notice that in a letter without much futuristic eschatology, this is one of those few verses where such an eschatological belief shines through.

the truth of the Good News. The truth here is the revealing of the “full or real state of affairs” (see *alētheia* [T⁶225, Z⁶237]; TDNT 1.238). This is a distinctive feature of the Good News, a distinctively Christian and Pauline usage of a common Greek term (*euangelion* [T⁶2098, Z⁶2295]), rarely used in the singular outside of Christian literature. This usage stems from the use of the verb in Isa 40:9; 52:7; 60:6 (“worshipping,” NLT); 61:1, which was picked up by Jesus. The Good News reveals things as they really are.

1:6 by changing lives . . . changed your lives. The verb Paul used means “to grow.” The translation assumes that the participle means “causing people to grow” (cf. 1 Cor 3:6-7). Thus, it is inconsistent to translate the metaphor “bearing fruit” literally and then translate the metaphor of “growing” dynamically. In the parable of the sower (Mark 4:8), the growth is a step toward “bearing fruit,” which seems to mean “multiplying.” Here, with the Good News as subject, the verb most likely parallels its use in the parable (although we do not know that the author had the parable explicitly in mind) and the dual “bear fruit” + “grow” indicates the spread of the Good News among them and in the entire world, not a change within the believer. That the pair appears again in 1:10 supports this interpretation here in that, there, each term is modified to indicate that the fruit-bearing and growth is now within the believer, who is the subject of the imperative (O’Brien 1982:13).

1:7 You learned about. Although Paul says the Ephesians “learned about Christ” (Eph 4:20), this is the only place he refers to learning about the Good News. Usually he talks about believing or obeying or perhaps hearing the Good News. In fact, references to learning are relatively rare in Paul and not that common in the NT in general (see *manthanō* [T⁶3129, Z⁶3443] in TDNT 4.406-412). Here Paul may have chosen “learned” to indicate either the thoroughness with which Epaphras had instructed the Colossians or his accuracy in transmitting the truth of the Good News. Either meaning would be an affirmation of Epaphras over against the ideas that Paul will oppose later in the letter. Thus the translation “learned about” rather than simply “learned” is unfortunate, for it suggests an acquaintance with a topic rather than a thorough grounding in a subject, which is what is implied here.

Epaphras. This is a shortened form of Epaphroditus, a common name in that period. A native Colossian (4:12), Epaphras had proclaimed the Good News in Colosse and elsewhere in the Lycus Valley, including Laodicea and Hierapolis. At one point he shared Paul’s imprisonment (Phlm 1:23), although at the time of the writing of Colossians he was no longer in prison. The name appears in its full form in Phil 2:25; 4:18, but the occurrence of the same name is not enough evidence to conclude that it refers to the same person, since, as indicated above, the name was common.

co-worker. Literally, “co-slave.” The word appears in the NT only in Matthew, Revelation, and Colossians—the other reference in Colossians being a reference to Tychicus. Paul several times refers to himself as a slave of Christ (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:1) but rarely refers to others as slaves of Christ unless they are joined with him. The one exception to this rule is Epaphras, who in 4:12 is called a slave of Christ. While in the OT being a slave of God indicated a worshiper and/or minister of God and thus honorable, in the Greek world, which valued freedom, a slave was simply someone owned by someone else. A slave might have significant power and be treated respectfully if his or her master were a person of honor and power (e.g., Caesar), but they had no status in themselves. Thus, Paul’s reference to himself as “slave” must have struck the ears of the Colossians and others as a startling expression. Here he joined Epaphras with him, meaning that Epaphras was equally Christ’s slave, a full sharer in Paul’s status as one totally given over to Christ. In that Paul uses this as a semi-official title for his closest co-workers, it shows how Paul honors people who have joined him in becoming slaves like Jesus (cf. Phil 2:7).

he is helping us on your behalf. The earliest mss and other witnesses (P⁴⁶ S* A B D* F G) have “he is ministering on our behalf,” as noted in NLT mg. In Greek both “our” and “your”

are words with four letters and with only one letter that differs between them. The NLT translators (following NA²⁷) assumed that the reading “our” (which occurs in the earlier mss) was an accidental copying of the “our” from “our beloved co-worker.” Yet the reading “our” does make sense in context, for it would be a commendation of Epaphras and an indication that Paul had indeed sent him to evangelize Colosse and therefore that his teaching there had been accurate. Thus, since “he is helping us” is a dynamic translation implied from “on your behalf” and “Christ’s faithful servant” (or “minister”), the phrase should be dropped. Simply “ministering on our behalf” is the preferred translation (Dunn 1996:63).

1:8 Spirit. This is the only reference to the Spirit in Colossians, which is extremely surprising given the number of times Paul normally refers to the Spirit (ten times in Ephesians, which Colossians parallels in many ways, and three in Philippians, for example). Some take the lack of references to the Spirit as one of the vocabulary indications that Colossians, in whole or in part, was not written by Paul. My perspective is that it indicates that Paul so wanted to focus on Christ that in this letter he almost failed to mention the Spirit and had relatively little to say about the Father. That is how important it was for him to center on Christ.

COMMENTARY

The introduction to the letter includes a part of the letter structure, namely the thanksgiving and prayer, and then bridges into praise—many would say a hymn of praise—first to the Father and then to Christ. This forms the theological foundation for the letter. The contents of the introduction are probably not something that the Colossians would dispute. If the praise is indeed a hymn, it may be one that the Colossians sang (or, more exactly, chanted) in their meetings and thus was familiar to them. This praise and the description of their salvation are the basis of the rest of Paul’s argument. He does not have something new to reveal to them, but rather he wants to compare the new ideas that are being foisted upon them with the foundation that they have in Christ and note the incompatibility. Thus, this introduction serves a very important purpose in the structure of the book.

The first part of the introduction is the thanksgiving, which falls into three parts. First we have the thanksgiving itself (1:3-10), then Paul segues into a prayer for the Colossians (1:11-12), and finally he recites the great things that the Father and Christ have done (1:13-22), which is the core theological insight of the letter.

It was normal in Greek letters to begin by thanking a god or gods for the recipient, so it is not surprising that Paul begins his letter with thanks (1:3). For Paul this was also natural, for he felt that life should be characterized by thanksgiving (1 Thess 5:18; cf. 2:7; 3:15; 4:2). In this thanksgiving, he was joined by his coauthor Timothy and perhaps others who were sending greetings (1:4; “we”), for Paul was no lone-wolf leader but one who served as part of a team.

In this case, the thanksgiving was based upon reports that Paul had received, perhaps through Epaphras or others, for he had never met the Colossians personally. But what reports they were! The Colossians were firmly committed to Jesus, and they showed this in how they loved other Christians (1:4). Interestingly enough, this commitment was inspired and nourished by an eschatological conviction—that is, a hope of what God had for them in heaven—for eschatology in the New Testament serves ethics. (For more on eschatology in Colossians, see “Author” in the Introduction.) That is, our present lifestyles show what we really believe about the future.

Thus, eschatology has little to do with getting a map of the future but more with having a conviction about the future that changes life today. A disturbing aspect about eschatological or “end times” teaching today is that it does not make the lives of Christians different from those around them if various surveys are to be believed. This shows that contemporary hope is shallow at best or at worst nonexistent.

The Colossians had heard the truth of the Good News (1:5). That is, they had heard the message about Jesus and his Kingdom, and it had given them a new vision of reality. This reframing of life enabled them to view their present life from the right perspective, which had given them the depth of commitment to Christ and the basis for their active love to others. If we really believe the message of Jesus, then we will realize that this world is transitory. This releases us, for example, to share our goods with others because we know that such actions give us reward in heaven—the only reward that counts.

This Good News, this message about Jesus, is indeed exciting. It is reason enough to make reading the Gospels part of one’s daily regimen. The Good News for Paul is like a plant or seed: It spreads widely. As I write I am looking out my window in the spring at dandelions. A seed dropped into the soil, and now it is growing and producing fruit. Soon the whole alley behind my office will be covered with their flowers. Such is the Good News. It had arrived in Colosse, and the Colossians had heard it. They received a new vision of reality, or, as Paul put it, they “understood the truth about God’s wonderful grace” (1:6). Having already mentioned faith, love, and hope, we are not surprised that Paul moves on to grace. The fact is that God is a giving God and has given to us in many ways: in creating us, in preserving our lives, and in ministering as our living Lord. Before the Good News arrived in our lives, we experienced grace from God ignorantly, but when the Good News arrived we realized the good things came from God and learned how much more God gave us in Jesus. This truth, this new vision of reality, reorients our lives, and that is precisely what it had done for the people in Colosse.

Paul mentions all of these things in the introduction purposely. Since the Colossians already had the truth, they did not need a new truth that some were apparently teaching in Colosse. Since they had faith, love, hope, and grace, what more were they seeking? And since they had all of these in Jesus Christ, why would they seek elsewhere? Even when Paul was reporting to them his thanksgiving for them, he was at the same time laying the groundwork for issues that he would deal with later in the letter.

The Colossians, as well as the people living in Laodicea and Hierapolis, had been evangelized by Epaphras (1:7). Could it be that they were wondering whether Epaphras had given them the full message? Paul went out of his way to underscore his confidence in what Epaphras had done. They had learned the Good News, says Paul, indicating that they had received a thorough grounding in it rather than just heard about it. As for the character of Epaphras himself, he was not just a slave of Jesus (as was Paul) or even a fellow slave with Paul, but a *beloved* fellow slave. Furthermore, he was Christ’s servant or minister (a different word from that meaning “slave”), which

alone is certainly praise, and he was a “faithful servant” who carried out his duties fully and in whom the head of household could trust. Finally, Paul added “on our behalf” (see note on 1:7), meaning that Paul had sent him to Colosse. This was in keeping with Paul’s typical methodology. He himself evangelized and planted a church in the main city in a region. During this process some of his converts developed into co-workers, or as he put it here, “fellow slave[s]” (one of the terms he appears to reserve for his closest co-workers.) It was these native apprentices of Paul whom he sent out to evangelize and plant churches in other cities of the province. In this case he had apparently sent Epaphras back to Colosse to represent him and the Good News. The Colossians had not received a second-rate imitation of the Good News but a thorough presentation by a tried, trusted, and faithful colleague of Paul’s. Epaphras and his presentation were fully and unequivocally endorsed by Paul, indicating that any deviation from this presentation of the Good News would not receive Paul’s stamp of approval.

Epaphras did more than carry the Good News to Colosse. He also carried news from Colosse back to Paul (1:8). In particular he reported the Good News from Colosse that the Colossians demonstrated “love in the Spirit” (NRSV), indicating either their positive regard toward Paul (perhaps expressed through a gift), whom they had never seen, or their loving deeds done to others there in Colosse. In either case, Paul viewed it as the fruit of the Spirit. To claim the Holy Spirit but not demonstrate love for others is to make a claim that is dubious at best; to claim to have learned the Good News but not be demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit is likewise to make a dubious claim. Wherever the Good News is truly received and taken to heart, the Spirit enters and transforms lives. Love for others is the evidence of this transformation. Thus, in reporting this love to Paul, Epaphras made it clear that the Colossians were truly converted. Surely such news was enough to bring great joy to Paul, whether he was in or out of prison. No wonder he was thankful.

◆ B. Prayer for the Colossians (1:9–12)

⁹So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. ¹⁰Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as

you learn to know God better and better.

¹¹We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy,^{*} ¹²always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light.

1:11 Or *all the patience and endurance you need with joy.*

NOTES

1:9 *complete knowledge of his will.* Literally, this phrase reads, “filled with the knowledge of his will.” Prayer to know God’s will is found in Ps 143:10 (cf. the many cases of “seeking/inquiring of the Lord” for direction in the OT, sometimes successfully [e.g., Judg



1 & 2
Thessalonians

PHILIP W. COMFORT

INTRODUCTION TO

1 & 2 Thessalonians

WRITTEN IN AD 51, these two epistles reflect a time period in the early church that was only 20 years after the time of Jesus Christ's ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. Among the earliest of the New Testament writings, they capture the excitement and anticipation the earliest Christians had for what they expected to be the imminent return of Christ. At the same time, the two epistles present the earliest and most basic proclamations of the apostles' teachings. As such, 1 and 2 Thessalonians should be read not only for what they teach about Christ's return (known as his Parousia) but also for what they teach about the most fundamental Christian truths—truths that will help us have the kind of spiritual lives that please Christ now and will honor him when he comes again to be glorified in and among his holy people.

AUTHORS

Although most writers ascribe the authorship of 1 and 2 Thessalonians to Paul alone, the evidence of the text itself, corroborated by the historical facts of Acts 15–18, points to multiple authorship. The names of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy appear at the beginning of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Plural authorship of 1 Thessalonians is signaled by the first person plural pronouns “we” and “us” appearing throughout the epistle. On three occasions in 1 Thessalonians, Paul speaks his own opinion as distinct from the other authors. In 2:18, we see the statement “I, Paul.” Although some could argue that this reveals Paul's sole authorship of 1 Thessalonians, the more likely scenario is that Paul had to personally identify himself as distinct from the other authors. In other words, he had to interrupt the plural authorship to interject a personal note. In 2:18, the authors first say “we wanted very much to come to you,” and then Paul interrupts by saying “and I, Paul, tried again and again.” Paul had to distinguish himself from Silvanus and Timothy because they had gone back to Thessalonica after the initial visit (see Acts 18:5; 1 Thess 3:1), whereas he had never made it back.

In 1 Thessalonians 3:5, the singular “I” is found, assumed by most readers to be Paul because the speaker indicates that he had sent Timothy to the Thessalonians (an action typical of Paul with respect to his younger co-worker—see 1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:19). In 5:27, we again see the singular “I,” who is assumed to be Paul, but this is not made explicit in the text. In many ancient letters, multiple authors signed off

at the end with their own distinct handwriting. Similarly, Paul probably wrote these closing comments in his own handwriting (see note on 1 Thess 5:27). Paul's handwriting would have been his personal imprimatur of the epistle as expressed in a final exhortation: "I command you in the name of the Lord to read this letter to all the brothers and sisters." In 2 Thessalonians, also, first person plurals ("we" and "us") appear throughout—with only two exceptions where the singular "I" appears twice (2 Thess 2:5; 3:17). In 2:5 we read, "Don't you remember that I told you about all this when I was with you?" Although most commentators assume this to be Paul speaking, we cannot be certain (see note on 2 Thess 2:5). At the end of 2 Thessalonians, Paul clearly states in the penultimate verse: "I write this greeting with my own hand—Paul—which is my signature in every letter" (my translation of 2 Thess 3:17; see note). Paul's personal signature at the end of the letter does not mean he was the sole author of 2 Thessalonians. To the contrary, 2 Thessalonians 3:14 explicitly affirms plural authorship: "Take note of those who refuse to obey what *we* say in this letter." And the last verse of each epistle ends with a plural designation signaling plural writers: "May the grace of *our* Lord Jesus Christ be with you [all]" (1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:18; my emphasis in both quotations).

We are not certain what part Timothy had in authoring 1 and 2 Thessalonians. He was certainly not the main author, since the first letter says "we sent Timothy . . . our brother and God's co-worker" (1 Thess 3:2) and "Timothy has just returned, bringing us good news" (1 Thess 3:6). These statements indicate that Paul and Silvanus were the senders and receivers of Timothy, thereby distinguishing Timothy's role. As is typical in other epistles where Paul names Timothy as one of the senders at the beginning (2 Corinthians, Colossians, Philemon), it becomes evident in the body of the letter that Timothy was not a coauthor as we would understand the term today. It is likely that since Timothy had provided Paul and Silvanus information about the condition of the church in Thessalonica, he was thereby listed as one of the contributors to 1 and 2 Thessalonians, even though he may not have had a hand in the composition.

This means that 1 and 2 Thessalonians were essentially coauthored by Paul and Silvanus. This is affirmed by 1 Thessalonians 2:2, which says, "You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi." The "we" here is none other than Paul and Silvanus. (Silvanus could have said this just as easily as Paul, so we need not think that Paul was speaking on their behalf when it could have been the other way around.) As already noted, Paul spoke out individually on occasion and he signed off with his personal signature at the end. This, in fact, shows that he did not pen the main body of the letter, but rather that when the letter was completed, Paul took pen (stylus) in hand to give his personal greeting in his own handwriting. Very likely, the body of the letter was in Silvanus's handwriting, so Paul's final greeting in his own handwriting would be distinct (see 2 Thess 3:17; cf. 1 Cor 16:21; Col 4:18). As noted before, it was customary for multiple-author letters to have one or more signatures with personal greetings at the end.

Silvanus (called Silas in Acts) was a leading Christian in the church at Jerusalem; he was a prophet and a Roman citizen. Silas was one of the two men (along with

Judas Barsabbas) chosen by the church to write the letter of the Jerusalem Council and deliver it to the gentile churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (Acts 15:22-23). The Greek text of Acts 15:23, *grapsantes* [^{TG1125}, ^{ZG1211}] *dia cheiros autōn* (having written it with their hands), refers to “two of the church leaders—Judas (also called Barsabbas) and Silas” in the previous verse (Acts 15:22). It was customary in ancient times for the composer or composers of an epistle to also read the epistle publicly. Thus, Silas and Judas Barsabbas were the two who wrote the letter and read the letter to the church in Antioch (Acts 15:30-31).

When Paul went on his second missionary journey, he took Silas along with him (as a replacement for Mark). Thereafter in the record of Acts, Paul and Silas are seen together raising up the church in Philippi (Acts 16:11-40) and then the church in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). Though Timothy had joined them prior to both of these events (Acts 16:1-3), he is not specified as having a hand in founding these two churches (although it can be assumed that he was present). Since both Paul and Silas functioned as cofounders of the church at Thessalonica, it stands to reason that they were also the coauthors of the two epistles to the Thessalonians. The entire narrative of Acts 15–18 reveals that these two were a team. Paul would not have written a letter to this church apart from Silas, nor would he merely have used his services as an amanuensis.

First Thessalonians 2:7 indicates that both Paul and Silas were “apostles of Christ.” This is “an idiom that identifies both men [as being] personally commissioned by Christ” (DPL 186). Church tradition places Silas among the 70 [or, 72] apostles (see Luke 10:1; Pseudo-Hippolytus, *On the Seventy Apostles* 50; Ante-Nicene Fathers 5.256). As one of this larger group of apostles, he would have been commissioned by Jesus Christ to preach the gospel and heal people in his name (Luke 10:1ff). As one of Jesus’ apostles, Silas was among those who saw the risen Christ—probably one of the 500 (1 Cor 15:3-9), who were among the larger group of “apostles.” “Although the term *apostles* can be used in the NT more narrowly to refer to the Twelve, the limitation of the apostles to the Twelve plus Paul is a creation of the later church” (DPL 185).

The name Silvanus also appears at the end of 1 Peter (1 Pet 5:12), where the text explicitly states that Peter wrote the epistle “with the help of Silvanus.” This means that Silvanus either functioned as an amanuensis for Peter, translated Peter’s letter (from Aramaic to Greek) as Peter dictated it, or composed a letter based on Peter’s thoughts. The last-mentioned function was not an unusual practice in ancient times nor in modern. Certain people, not gifted with writing, give that task to another, who expresses in words the thoughts of the author. (In modern times, this person is often called a “ghostwriter.”)

However we interpret 1 Peter 5:12, it is clear that Silvanus could write Greek well and served Peter in that capacity. This also strongly suggests that he had a hand in the composition of 1 and 2 Thessalonians and was not just named at the beginning of the epistles because he was one of the cofounders of the church at Thessalonica. Of Silvanus’s joint authorship of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, F. F. Bruce says, “The *a priori* likelihood that such a man would be a joint-author of letters in which he is named

as one of the senders, in a substantial and not a merely nominal sense, is borne out by the internal evidence" (1982:xxxii).

The internal evidence shows that the two epistles are not peculiarly Pauline. Those who study Paul's writings will recognize that the style of 1 and 2 Thessalonians is syntactically, grammatically, and lexically simpler than what one typically finds elsewhere under Paul's name. Furthermore, the substance of the teachings in 1 and 2 Thessalonians is not uniquely Pauline. There is no discussion (or even mention) of justification by faith, the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the one body, and the war between flesh and spirit—to name a few favorite Pauline themes. This is not to say that Paul would disagree with anything in 1 and 2 Thessalonians—after all, he was a cowriter—but it is to say that had Paul himself expressed the same truths they likely would have been more complex and textured.

What we have in 1 and 2 Thessalonians are the basic tenets of the Christian kerygma circulating in the early church. These were the truths of the faith imparted by the apostles, among whom were Paul and Silvanus, as well as by other teachers such as Timothy. Thus, the letters are not distinctively Pauline. No doubt, this is what has caused some scholars to doubt Pauline authorship altogether. F. C. Burkitt thought both the epistles were the work of Silvanus (1924:130-133). Baur (1875–1876:2.85-92) was one of the first to doubt that Paul wrote either 1 or 2 Thessalonians. In Baur's view, 1 Thessalonians was based on the book of Acts, which he believed was written in the second century; and he thought 2 Thessalonians must have been influenced by the Johannine Apocalypse, with the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:3-10) patterned after the Beast of Revelation 13. However, the notion of the Antichrist preceding the coming of the Christ was discussed even prior to the first century (see Dan 9:24-27; 11:36-45). Other scholars have questioned Paul's authorship because of the difference between the teaching about significant future events in the two letters (see discussion below under "The Order of the Two Epistles"). Some have contested that both are non-Pauline; others argue that 1 Thessalonians is genuine but not 2 Thessalonians (for a good summary, see Green 2002:59-64). But 2 Thessalonians 3:17 (which has Paul's signature) makes it more than clear that Paul was one of its authors. It stands to reason then that the first letter (which is in many ways strikingly similar) was also composed by Paul (with others).

First and Second Thessalonians are the work of three individuals, with Paul and Silvanus functioning more as authors than Timothy did. Among the two, Silvanus probably took the lead in actually writing the epistles in collaboration with Paul, who signed off on both of them. In this commentary, therefore, I will use "the authors" or "the apostles" when speaking of the writers and not "Paul" (as in most commentaries).

OCCASION AND DATE OF WRITINGS

Occasion for Writing 1 Thessalonians According to Acts 17:1-14, Paul, Silas (Silvanus), and Timothy, in the course of their work in the Roman province of Macedonia, came from Philippi to Thessalonica. According to his custom, Paul first went to the

synagogue, and for three Sabbaths explained and proved from the Scriptures that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead and that Jesus was that Messiah (Acts 17:1-3; cf. Luke 24:45-46). A small number of Jews responded positively, while a greater contingent of Godfearers and important women of the city accepted the gospel (Acts 17:4). Godfearers were those who had adopted certain aspects of Jewish theology and conduct but had not become full converts to Judaism. Luke did not recount the entire evangelistic effort in the city since the greatest number of Christians converted from paganism (1:9). Thus, the actual time Paul, Silas, and Timothy spent in Thessalonica was certainly more than three weeks (i.e., three Sabbaths) because the authors of 1 Thessalonians spoke of working for their own support so as not to financially burden the Thessalonians (2:9). Furthermore, Philippians 4:16 speaks of the Philippian Christians twice sending help to Paul in Thessalonica.

The positive response to the gospel—especially by Gentiles—stirred up the jealousy of the Jews, who gathered some rabble from the marketplace and started a riot. They rushed the house of Jason where Paul was staying, but when they were unable to find Paul, they dragged his host and some other new believers before the city officials. They accused Paul and Silas of causing civil disturbances elsewhere and faulted Jason for extending hospitality to them (Acts 17:5-7a). The accusation was calculated to generate opposition to the gospel. They also accused the Christian workers of violating the decrees of Caesar (“They are all guilty of treason against Caesar,” 17:7b). These decrees had been issued during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius and were still in effect when Claudius ruled. They prohibited predicting anyone’s death, especially that of the emperor. Paul and Silvanus had come to the city proclaiming Jesus Christ’s supreme kingship; from their perspective, this appeared to predict an end to the emperor’s reign (1:10; 4:16; 2 Thess 2:3-8; see Green 2002:49-51). The Thessalonian officials, anxious to preserve Roman favor, took immediate action. Jason had to post bond as a promise that there would be no further trouble (Acts 17:8-9), and in the end, Paul and his companions left town under cover of night and made their way to Berea (Acts 17:10).

The hostility of the Thessalonian Jews toward Paul is seen in the fact that when they learned he was preaching at Berea, they followed him there and stirred up the crowds against him (Acts 17:13). Paul left that city and was escorted by some Christian brothers to Athens, while Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. Paul sent word back to Silas and Timothy that they should join him as soon as possible (Acts 17:14-15). Evidently, Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul in Athens, and then Paul and Silas sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the church was faring in the midst of persecution (3:2). Paul left Athens and went to Corinth (Acts 18:1), while Silas possibly stayed in Athens for a while before going on to cities in Macedonia other than Thessalonica—because Timothy seems to have been the sole emissary to the church there. After some time, Silas joined Timothy (perhaps in Thessalonica) and returned with him to Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5). Timothy reported to both Paul and Silvanus the situation of the church in Thessalonica (3:6-8). Subsequently, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy wrote an epistle to them, the one known as 1 Thessalonians.

grew older, its theology became more mature, especially with respect to the significance of Christ's death and resurrection, as well as his incarnation and ascension. Furthermore, later writings provide greater understanding about the deity of Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, both 1 and 2 Thessalonians contain language that ascribes deity to Jesus (see notes and commentary on 1 Thess 3:11-13; 2 Thess 1:12).

In 1 and 2 Thessalonians the authors present a very clear view of God's role in the believers' salvation and life. Believers are those who have experienced the calling of God (1 Thess 2:13; 4:7; 5:24; 2 Thess 1:11) because they are the chosen ones of God (1 Thess 1:4; 5:9; 2 Thess 2:13). Their salvation comes when they hear and believe the gospel of God, which is none other than the Word of God (1 Thess 1:8; 2:2, 8, 13). The goal of their salvation is holiness, a necessary condition for being ready for the parousia of Jesus (1 Thess 3:13; 4:3, 7; 5:23-24).

The Holy Spirit is instrumental in the entire process of the Christian life—from salvation to complete sanctification. When the Thessalonians first heard the gospel, it was the Spirit that empowered it (1 Thess 1:5). When they encountered persecution, they were inspired by the Spirit to face it with joy (1 Thess 1:6). All throughout their Christian lives, whether in suffering or in joy, God gives believers the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 4:8) to be the presence of God in their lives and in their meetings (1 Thess 5:19). It is the Holy Spirit who makes the believers holy and thereby prepared to meet the Lord Jesus with confidence (1 Thess 5:23).

OUTLINE OF 1 THESSALONIANS

- I. Opening of the Letter (1:1-10)
 - A. Greetings from Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (1:1)
 - B. Opening Prayer (1:2-10)
- II. The Apostles' Concern for the Thessalonians (2:1-16)
- III. Timothy's Report about the Church (2:17-3:8)
- IV. Thanksgiving and Prayer (3:9-13)
- V. The Apostles' Advice on Life in the Community (4:1-12)
- VI. The Parousia of the Lord Jesus (4:13-5:11)
- VII. Final Exhortations (5:12-22)
- VIII. Concluding Prayer (5:23-24)
- IX. Closing of the Letter (5:25-28)

OUTLINE OF 2 THESSALONIANS (COMMENTARY BEGINS ON P. 381)

- I. Opening of the Letter (1:1-2)
- II. Praise for Enduring Persecution until the Lord's Parousia (1:3-12)
- III. The Parousia of Jesus and the Parousia of the Lawless One (2:1-12)
- IV. Thanksgiving for Salvation (2:13-17)
- V. Prayer for the Proclamation of the Gospel (3:1-5)
- VI. Final Exhortations (3:6-15)
- VII. Closing of the Letter (3:16-18)

COMMENTARY ON
1 Thessalonians

◆ I. Opening of the Letter (1:1-10)

A. Greetings from Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy (1:1)

This letter is from Paul, Silas,* and Timothy, to you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are writing to the church in Thessalonica, May God give you grace and peace.

1:1 Greek *Silvanus*, the Greek form of the name.

NOTES

1:1 Paul. He is listed at the beginning of 13 epistles, sometimes alone (Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus), and at other times with another co-worker or two—namely, Timothy (2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon), Sosthenes (1 Corinthians), or Silvanus (1 and 2 Thessalonians).

Silas. Lit., “Silvanus.” Silas was probably a Semitic name, possibly *seila*, the Aramaic form of Saul. There is little doubt that he is to be identified with “Silvanus” (1:1; 2 Cor 1:19; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Pet 5:12), which is probably the Latinized form of “Silas” (NBD 1112). Silvanus was a coauthor of this epistle (see “Authors” in the Introduction and commentary).

Timothy. He is here listed with Paul, as in four other epistles (2 Corinthians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, Philemon). See Introduction under “Authors” and commentary for a discussion of Timothy’s participation in writing this epistle.

the church. The word *ekklēsia* [T⁶1577, Z⁶1711] was used in common parlance to denote the assembly of free citizens in a Greek city (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). This familiar, nonreligious term among the Greeks was picked up by the NT writers in its most basic meaning of “gathering” to describe the assembly of believers. The term was also used in the LXX to refer to the assembly of God’s people and may have been carried over into the NT from there.

in Thessalonica. Lit., “of the Thessalonians.”

you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no uniformity in Paul’s Epistles as to how each of the local churches are described: (1) all God’s beloved in Rome (Rom 1:7); (2) the church of God in Corinth (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1); (3) the churches of Galatia (Gal 1:2); the holy ones [in Ephesus] (Eph 1:1); (4) the holy ones in Christ Jesus in Philippi (Phil 1:1); (5) the holy ones and faithful in Christ in Colosse (Col 1:2); and (6) the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ (1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). It is worthy of note that the epistles addressed to the same localities get the same designations twice in a row, perhaps suggesting that Paul or his amanuensis kept and used the exemplar when writing the next epistle. Other than that, the common element of the Pauline Epistles is that the locality is always listed.

grace and peace. This reading has the support of B F G 044 0278 1739 it cop^{sa}. Other manuscripts (Ⲡ A D I 33 Ⲛ syr^h** cop^{bo}) add “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus

Christ." Had this phrase originally been in the text, there is no good reason to explain why it was deleted. Rather, it is easier to understand why it was added. In the introduction to nearly all of his epistles, Paul gave the blessing of grace and peace as coming from God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ (see Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Phlm 1:3). Thus, it would seem very unusual to some scribes for it not to be the same here; consequently, the verse was conformed to Pauline style. But the authors of 1 Thessalonians chose not to use the expression "God the Father and Lord Jesus Christ" twice in a row (the first part of the verse reads, "to the church in Thessalonica, to you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"), so they wrote a short blessing: "May God give you grace and peace." Indeed, "grace and peace" was the most primitive expression, which then became elongated in subsequent epistles. The simple expression (without attaching divine names) may have come from the hand of Silvanus, the writer of 1 Pet (cf. 1 Pet 1:2). "Grace" (*charis*) is the usual Greek greeting, and "peace" (*eirēnē*) is derived from the usual Jewish greeting (*shalom*).

COMMENTARY

Ancient letters opened with a prescript, which consisted of three elements: the sender(s), the recipient, and the salutation (cf. Weima 2000b:642). Thus, all letters followed this pattern: (1) X (in the nominative case); (2) to Y (in the dative case); (3) greetings. An example from the first century illustrates this:

Seneca to his own Lucilius, greeting.
(Seneca, *Moral Essays* Letter 6, c. AD 62–64)

The adaptation in 1 Thessalonians is as follows:

1. Senders: Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy.
2. Recipients: to the church of the Thessalonians.
3. Greeting: Grace to you and peace.

Following these three elements, a traditional letter would often have a wish for good health (as in 3 John 1:2) or a thanksgiving formula (as in what follows in 1:2).

The three senders of 1 Thessalonians are listed as Paul, Silvanus (otherwise known as Silas), and Timothy. Paul and Silvanus were the founders of the church at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-14) and the main coauthors of this epistle (see the full discussion on this in the Introduction under "Authors")—with Timothy functioning as a contributor to its content. First and Second Thessalonians are unique among all the New Testament books in that they were the products of multiple authorship. Even in the other epistles where more than one person's name appears at the head (Paul and Sosthenes in 1 Corinthians; Paul and Timothy in 2 Corinthians, Philippian, and Colossians), the author is clearly Paul, who uses the singular "I" throughout the body of each epistle. Joint composition of letters was known in the ancient world. For example, in Cicero's letter *To Atticus* he says, "For my part I have gathered from your letters—both that which you wrote in conjunction with others and the one you wrote in your own name . . ." (11.5.1). We are not certain what part Timothy had in authoring 1 Thessalonians. He was probably not the actual writer, and he was very likely not one of the main authors, since

the letter says, “We sent Timothy to visit you. He is our brother and God’s co-worker” (3:2) and “But now Timothy has just returned” (3:6). These statements indicate that Paul and Silvanus sent and received Timothy, thereby excluding Timothy from the authorial “we.” Nonetheless, Timothy supplied information concerning the situation at Thessalonica and thereby became an important contributor to the content of the epistle.

This epistle is addressed to “the church in Thessalonica, to you who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This nomenclature indicates that the church was identified by specific locality and consisted of the local believers. This was the ecclesiastical situation of the early church. All churches were local churches designated by the name of their locality—in this case, Thessalonica. There was no hierarchy greater than the local church governing a region or a state or a country. The New Testament speaks of the church in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, etc. All the believers in a particular locality comprised the church in that locality, whether they met in one house or several houses.

In the New Testament, the Greek word *ekklēsia* [TG1577, ZG1711] (usually translated “church”) is used primarily in two ways: (1) to describe a meeting or an assembly, and (2) to designate the people who participate in such assembling together—whether they are actually assembled or not. The New Testament contains a few passages that speak of a secular assembly (Acts 19:32, 39, 41); every other passage speaks of a Christian assembly. Sometimes the word *ekklēsia* is used to designate the actual meeting together of Christians. This is certainly what Paul intended in 1 Corinthians 14:19, 28, and 35, in which the expression *en* [TG1722, ZG1877] *ekklēsia* must mean “in a meeting” and not “in the church.” Aside from the few instances where the word clearly means the actual meeting together of believers, *ekklēsia* most often is used as a designation for the believers who constitute a local church (such as the church in Corinth, the church in Philippi, and the church in Colosse) or all the believers (past, present, and future) who constitute the universal church, the complete body of Christ (Comfort 1993:153-158). In 1 Thessalonians 1:1 it refers to all the Christians who lived in Thessalonica.

The blessing of “grace and peace” is the earliest form of blessing exchanged among believers; it is found at the beginning of nearly all the New Testament epistles. (See all of the Pauline Epistles, including 1 and 2 Timothy, which add “mercy” to “grace and peace”; see 1 and 2 Peter; Revelation 1:4.) The Greek word for “grace” (*charis* [TG5485, ZG5921]) denotes a gift that gives joy to the receiver. The Greek word for “peace” *eirēnē* [TG1515, ZG1645]) denotes spiritual well-being and contentedness. The expression “grace” reflects the traditional Hellenistic greeting (*chairein* [TG5463, ZG5897], “good wishes”), and the expression “peace” reflects the traditional Hebrew greeting (*shalom* [TH7965, ZH8934], “may all be well”). The fact that the blessing of “grace and peace” is short and sweet in 1 Thessalonians probably speaks to the fact that this epistle is one of the earliest writings (see note on 1:2). In due course, the blessing was often expanded with the prepositional phrase, “from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

◆ B. Opening Prayer (1:2-10)

²We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly. ³As we pray to our God and Father about you, we think of your faithful work, your loving deeds, and the enduring hope you have because of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴We know, dear brothers and sisters,* that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people. ⁵For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance* that what we said was true. And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you. ⁶So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and

the Lord. ⁷As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece—throughout both Macedonia and Achaia.*

⁸And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it, ⁹for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God. ¹⁰And they speak of how you are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment.

1:4 Greek *brothers*. 1:5 Or with the power of the Holy Spirit, so you can have full assurance. 1:7 Macedonia and Achaia were the northern and southern regions of Greece.

NOTES

1:2 *We always thank God for all of you.* This is the first of three thanksgivings for the church the authors express (cf. 2:13; 3:9).

1:3 *faithful work . . . loving deeds . . . enduring hope.* This is an excellent dynamic-equivalence rendering of three expressions that are literally, “work of faith, labor of love, endurance of hope.” The three genitives indicate that work comes out of faith, labor comes out of love, and endurance comes out of hope. In the context of 1 Thessalonians, the hope is in the coming of the Lord Jesus, a hope that helped the Thessalonians endure persecution.

because of our Lord Jesus Christ. Or, “in our Lord Jesus Christ,” as an objective genitive, connecting it with “hope.” The believers’ hope is in the hope of Jesus Christ’s return (1:10).

1:4 *God loves you and has chosen you.* A similar thought is expressed in 2 Thess 2:13 (see note). Ephesians 1:4 also indicates that divine love was the motivation of God’s election: “God loved us and chose us in Christ.” The believers are called the “elect” two times in 1 Peter (1 Pet 1:1; 2:9), an epistle cowritten by Silvanus (1 Pet 5:12).

1:5 *we brought you the Good News.* This is a good functional equivalent of “our gospel.” Since this expression appears only one other place in the Pauline Epistles (2 Thess 2:14), it adds evidence for the multiple authorship of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Paul had a habit of calling the gospel “my gospel” or “the gospel I preach” in an effort to affirm the apostolic authority of his gospel message (Rom 2:16; Gal 1:11). One scribe (C) changed it to “the gospel of God,” and another scribe (X*) changed it to “the gospel of our God.”

but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance. The NLT mg provides an alternative rendering: “with the power of the Holy Spirit, so you can have full assurance.” A similar expression appears in 1 Pet 1:12, which speaks of the Good News being brought to people through the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for “full assurance” (*plērophoria* [T64136, Z64443]) can also mean “complete fullness,” in this case the fullness of the divine work.

COMMENTARY ON *2 Thessalonians*

◆ I. Opening of the Letter (1:1-2)

This letter is from Paul, Silas,* and Timothy.

We are writing to the church in Thessalonica, to you who belong to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

²May God our Father* and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

1:1 Greek *Silvanus*, the Greek form of the name. 1:2 Some manuscripts read *God the Father*.

NOTES

1:1 *Paul, Silas, and Timothy*. This epistle is the work of three authors, not just Paul (see discussion on “Authors” in the Introduction).

***the church in Thessalonica*.** Lit., “church of the Thessalonians.”

***Lord Jesus Christ*.** All manuscripts read this, including $\text{P}30^{\text{vid}}$, according to Grenfell and Hunt’s reconstruction (see *editio princeps* of P.Oxyrhynchus 1598). According to Comfort and Barrett (2001:131), however, it seems more likely that $\text{P}30$ reads “grace of the Lord Jesus.”

1:2 *God our Father*. This is the reading found in $\text{N}^{\text{A}} \text{F} \text{G} \text{I} 0278 \text{M}$ it syr cop^{sa}. Other manuscripts read, “God [the] Father”: B D 0111^{vid} 33 1739. Since the manuscript evidence for the two readings is evenly distributed, it is difficult to make a decision on external grounds. Internal considerations are no less divided. On one hand, it could be argued that “our” was added to conform this verse to other Pauline introductions where the formulaic expression nearly always is “God our Father.” On the other hand, it could be argued that “our” was dropped to avoid repeating the wording of the first verse (“God our Father”).

1:2 *grace and peace*. These two words appear as a pair at the beginning of all Paul’s Major Epistles (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1).

COMMENTARY

Ancient letters opened with a prescript, which consists of three elements: the sender(s), the recipient, and the salutation (cf. Weima 2000b:642). Thus, all letters followed this pattern: (1) X (in the nominative case); (2) to Y (in the dative case); (3) greetings (see commentary on 1 Thess 1:1 for an example). The adaptation in 2 Thessalonians is as follows:

1. Senders: Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy.
2. Recipients: to the church of the Thessalonians.
3. Greeting: Grace to you and peace.

The three senders of 1 Thessalonians are listed as Paul, Silvanus (otherwise known as Silas), and Timothy. Paul and Silvanus were the founders of the church at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-14) and the main coauthors of this epistle (see the full discussion in the Introduction under “Authors”). Timothy was their co-worker and had been an emissary between them and the Thessalonians.

First and Second Thessalonians are unique among all the New Testament books in that they were the products of multiple authorship. Even in other epistles where more than one person’s name appears at the head (Paul and Sosthenes in 1 Corinthians; Paul and Timothy in 2 Corinthians, Philippians, and Colossians), the author is clearly Paul, who uses the personal “I” throughout the body of each epistle. Joint composition of letters was known in the ancient world. For example, in Cicero’s letter *To Atticus* he says, “For my part I have gathered from your letters—both that which you wrote in conjunction with others and the one you wrote in your own name” (11.5.1).

The recipients of the letter are the same as those who received 1 Thessalonians: “the church in Thessalonica . . . who belong to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1).

◆ II. Praise for Enduring Persecution until the Lord’s Parousia (1:3-12)

³Dear brothers and sisters,* we can’t help but thank God for you, because your faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing. ⁴We proudly tell God’s other churches about your endurance and faithfulness in all the persecutions and hardships you are suffering. ⁵And God will use this persecution to show his justice and to make you worthy of his Kingdom, for which you are suffering. ⁶In his justice he will pay back those who persecute you.

⁷And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels, ⁸in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don’t know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord

Jesus. ⁹They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power. ¹⁰When he comes on that day, he will receive glory from his holy people—praise from all who believe. And this includes you, for you believed what we told you about him.

¹¹So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do. ¹²Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored because of the way you live, and you will be honored along with him. This is all made possible because of the grace of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ.*

1:3 Greek *Brothers*. 1:12 Or *of our God and our Lord Jesus Christ*.

NOTES

1:3 *your faith is flourishing*. The testing of the Thessalonians’ faith was foremost on the minds of the apostles. They were very glad to hear that their faith was not diminishing under persecution. Rather, it was flourishing.

***your love for one another is growing*.** In the first epistle the writers commended them for their love to other believers (1 Thess 3:6) and prayed that it would increase (1 Thess 3:12).

1:4 your endurance and faithfulness in all the persecutions and hardships you are suffering. This statement lies at the heart of this epistle. Since the Thessalonians were suffering persecution, the writers felt inspired to encourage them and to reveal to them the outcome of this ordeal—all of which is described in the following verses (1:5–2:12).

1:5 to show his justice. This is a dynamic rendering of “an evident indication of righteous judgment,” which stands in apposition to 1:4. As such, it is saying (quite contrary to our ways of thinking) that suffering persecution is evidence of God’s righteous judgment (see commentary for further discussion).

make you worthy of his Kingdom. Lit., “counted worthy of the Kingdom.” The same Greek verb (*kataxioō* [T⁶2661, Z⁶2921]) in a similar context appears in Acts 5:41, where the apostles were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus. Those whom God calls to participate in his Kingdom will suffer for the Kingdom (Acts 14:22; 1 Thess 2:12).

1:6 justice. God’s justice will become evident when he punishes the Thessalonians’ persecutors (1:8-9).

he will pay back. This quite literal translation of the Greek is an excellent, easily understood rendering for modern readers who know and use the idiom “payback” as an expression for “exacting revenge.”

1:7 rest. The Greek is *anesin* [T⁶425, Z⁶457]; in this context it refers to relief from sufferings, an experience to be shared by both the apostles and the Thessalonians (“for you . . . and also for us”).

when the Lord Jesus appears. Elsewhere, the writers speak of Christ’s coming as a *parousia* (2:1; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23), but here it is said to be an unveiling (*apokalupsei* [T⁶602, Z⁶637]). The Lord’s *parousia* will be an epiphany (see note on 2:8), whereby the invisible Jesus will become visible to the persecuted Christians, as well as to their persecutors (Matt 24:30; 1 Pet 4:13).

from heaven. This points to Jesus’ present dwelling place, as well as to his authority (1 Thess 1:10; 4:16).

1:8 in flaming fire, bringing judgment. God’s judgment is often said to be accompanied by fire (Isa 66:15-16; 2 Pet 3:7, 10). But fire is also used to depict God’s glory (Exod 3:2; 19:18; Deut 33:2; Ps 18:8; Ezek 1:13, 27). So the expression also depicts the glory accompanying the Lord’s *parousia*.

bringing judgment on those who don’t know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News. This combines allusions to Isa 66:15 and 66:4 in the LXX: “he will bring punishment with the fury of his anger” and “for when I called, they did not answer.” Some commentators (see Marshall 1983:177-178) think two groups of people are designated here: Gentiles who don’t know God (1 Thess 4:5), and Jews who disobeyed the gospel (Rom 10:16). Other commentators (see Green 2002:290-291; Morris 1991:202-203) see this as two descriptions of the same kind of people—those who are culpably ignorant of God (that is, they willfully chose not to know him; cf. Rom 1:18) and therefore rejected the gospel when it was presented to them (Rom 2:8).

1:9 will be punished. Lit., “will pay a penalty.”

eternal destruction. The combination of words in Greek, *olethron aiōnion* [T⁶3639/166, Z⁶3897/173], conveys the idea of “eternal death” (BDAG 702). The word *olethron* was also used in 1 Thess 5:3 to speak of the utter ruin and destruction that would come upon unbelievers at the time of Jesus’ *parousia*.

separated from the Lord. The Greek preposition *apo* [T⁶575, Z⁶608] (from) signals separation. The result of the punishment of eternal destruction is to be separated from the Lord

eternally. Such separation means absolute destruction (*olethron*) because the Lord is the source of life; to be cut off from the Lord Jesus is to be cut off from life (1 John 5:12).

and from his glorious power. This language harkens back to Isa 2:10, 19, 21, which speak of the dreadful day of Yahweh's judgment, a day when people will try to hide from the splendor of his majesty.

1:10 When he comes on that day. This alludes to Ps 96:13, which speaks of the Lord coming to judge the earth. This is the Day of the Lord (2:2; 1 Thess 5:2, 4), a day wherein the Lord Jesus will execute judgment on those who reject the gospel.

glory from his holy people. Lit., "to be glorified in his holy people" or "to be glorified among his holy people." This parallels the language of Ps 89:7 [88:8, LXX]: "God is glorified in the council of his holy ones."

praise from all who believe. The verb translated *praise* is *thaumazō* [T⁶2296, Z⁶2513] (marvel). This is an allusion to Ps 68:35 [67:36] as it appears in the LXX: "God will be marveled at in/among his holy ones."

for you believed what we told you about him. How people respond to Jesus Christ will determine their eternal destiny (see 1:8).

1:11 to live a life worthy of his call. The Greek verb (*axioō* [T⁶515, Z⁶546]) means "count worthy"; it shares the same root as the verb used in 1:5 (see note).

1:12 Then . . . Jesus will be honored because of the way you live. Lit., "So that . . . Jesus may be glorified in you."

the name of our Lord Jesus. This reading has the support of \aleph B D L 044 0111 ^{it^b} ^{cop^{sa}}. The title is expanded to "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" in other mss (A F G P 0278 33 1739 syr—so TR). The documentary evidence for the text is superior to that of the variant, not to mention that the variant is probably the result of scribal assimilation to the next clause of this verse, which reads "Lord Jesus Christ."

and you will be honored along with him. This is spoken of again in 2:14, as well as in 1 Thess 2:12. This glorification is linked to Jesus' coming (Rom 8:17-18; Col 3:4).

the grace of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ. The marginal rendering ("the grace of our God and our Lord Jesus Christ") is favored by several commentators who think God and Jesus are mentioned separately here (see Harris 1992:265-266). However, others (including myself) think the NLT rendering is preferable because in the Greek, there is one article governing the two titles "God" and "Lord Jesus Christ" joined by the conjunction *kai* [T⁶2532, Z⁶2779] (and). According to a Greek grammatical rule called the "Granville Sharp Rule" (see Dana and Mantey 1927:146-153), this structure indicates that the two nouns describe one person. In this case, Jesus Christ is both God and Lord. This rendering is affirmed by Turner (1965:16), Porter (1992:110-111), and Green (2002:299-300), to name a few. The same kind of structure appears in Titus 2:13 and 2 Pet 1:1, where there is one article governing two nouns joined by *kai*, yielding the rendering "our God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (so NLT). Jesus Christ is called God elsewhere in the NT (John 1:1, 18; 20:18; Rom 9:5; Phil 2:6).

COMMENTARY

This section is the mirror image of 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10 in that both passages emphasize the Thessalonians' endurance in suffering (1:4; 1 Thess 1:3, 6) as a model for other churches (1:3-4; 1 Thess 1:7-10). Second Thessalonians 1:3-10 adds to 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10 extra emphasis concerning the eschatological judgment of their oppressors (1:5-10).

Immediately after thanking God for the Thessalonian church (1:3-4a), the writers addressed the issue of their persecution (1:4b). The persecution against the church appears to have intensified since their first letter to them (1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3-4). As was noted in the Introduction, we are not told how Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy found out about the situation, except that they had heard (3:11) from some unnamed person about the affairs in Thessalonica. And we are not told the exact nature of the persecution they were suffering. Nonetheless, it is known that the Thessalonian Christians were being persecuted by their own people (see commentary on 1 Thess 2:14-16)—that is, fellow Hellenists.

According to the record of Acts 17:1-9, Jews in Thessalonica instigated the persecution against Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. They prompted the civil authorities to take action against the apostles by accusing them of being “guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, named Jesus” (Acts 17:7). This is the same kind of strategy the Jews in Jerusalem used when they convinced Pontius Pilate to condemn and crucify Jesus. In any event, the civil authorities in Thessalonica took this accusation as truth and arrested several Christian believers (including Jason, who had housed the apostles). Later, they were released from jail on bond. In the meantime, the apostles had escaped and gone on to Berea. Evidently, the persecution continued against the Thessalonian Christians—primarily from their fellow Hellenists because 1 Thessalonians 2:12-14 makes it clear that their suffering came at the hands of their own countrymen. Although this doesn’t exclude Jewish Thessalonians, it most likely means Hellenistic Thessalonians. This is further suggested by the wording in 2 Thessalonians 1:8, which names the enemies of God’s people as being “those who don’t know God”—an expression used of pagans. However, the very next phrase, “those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus” could be applied to unbelieving Jews as well as to pagans (see note on 1:8). Whoever was persecuting the Thessalonians, it must have been severe to have evinced such a strong response from the apostles in 1:7-9. In short, the writers promised the Thessalonians that the Lord Jesus would enact his wrathful vengeance on those who had persecuted them. This promise would have influenced the Thessalonians in two ways: (1) It would give them hope during their trials, and (2) it would prevent them from seeking their own ways to get revenge. Vengeance is the Lord’s.

Though we are not told exactly what kind of suffering the Thessalonians were experiencing, we can gather from the record in Acts and other early writings what the Christians had to deal with. Christians were hated by Jews because they accepted a Messiah whom the Jews rejected. This is made more than clear throughout the book of Acts. And Christians were hated by fellow Hellenists because they rejected the gods and festivals the Hellenists revered. In this regard, they were considered “atheists” (those not believing in the traditional Roman gods) and disloyal rebels (for they would not recognize Caesar as lord and god). The pagan perception of Christians during the first two centuries is shocking to modern readers. This perception can be gathered from the writings of Roman

historians and governors. When Tacitus and Suetonius described Nero's persecution against the Christians (AD 62–65), they termed Christianity as "a pernicious superstition . . . a disease . . . horrible and shameful"; "a new and mischievous superstition" (see Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2). Tacitus indicated that Christians were "hated for their vices" and that they "were convicted, not so much on the count of arson [Caesar had blamed them for the fire in Rome] as for hatred of the human race" (*Annals* 15.44).

According to Pliny (who was writing to the Emperor Trajan in AD 112), their worship of Jesus threatened to exterminate the traditional forms of Roman worship. And the Christians' refusal to invoke the Roman gods and make offerings to the emperor's statue was a treasonous act, which undermined the empire's security (see Pliny's *Letters* 10.96). When Pliny asked Trajan on what grounds Christians should be punished, three criteria emerged:

1. Was age a factor?
2. Are apostates (those who renounce Christ) to be pardoned?
3. Is it the name (*nomen*) or the crimes (*flagitia*) associated with the name that are to be punished?

Trajan left it up to Pliny's discretion as to whether or not he should execute the young or old. But the other two matters called for an answer, which was not easy for Trajan to give because the two are intertwined: Being a member of the group—i.e., to bear the name of Christ—was considered a crime in itself. Christians thought they should be judged for actual, specific crimes, but they were punished for being members of the group—for owning and confessing the Name.

Pagans, misunderstanding Christian terminology, had spread many false rumors about what went on in the meetings of Christians. Misunderstanding "the partaking of the body and blood of Jesus," they accused Christians of infant sacrifice and cannibalism. Misunderstanding the notion of a Christian love feast (which was simply the sharing of a meal on the Lord's Day), pagans accused Christians of having sexual orgies (see Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 9, 31). This is reflected in Peter's words in which he says that unbelievers considered the Christians to be wrongdoers: "Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world" (1 Pet 2:12).

Above all the charges, the most potent was that Christians were "haters of the human race" (*odio humani generis*). They had acquired this stigma because of their refusal to participate in the Roman religions and because the Christian community was secluded, secretive, and self-contained. Outsiders perceived this community to be aloof and mysterious. The early Christians shouldn't be blamed for this. Their secretive solidarity was caused by the outside persecutions, first from the Jews and then from the Romans—even as Jesus had predicted (see John 16:1-4).

The claims that early Christians made about Christ—the very names they called him ("Lord," "Christ," "Savior," "God," "King")—were being attributed to many of the Roman leaders of their times. Roman generals and emperors assumed divine

status as soon as they penetrated Asia Minor, especially after Augustus Caesar came to full power (27 BC). Augustus saw his reign as the inauguration of a new age of peace for Rome and the world. The Romans acclaimed him as “savior.” In Antioch, coins depicted Augustus as the incarnate Zeus or “worship-worthy Son of God,” and altars were erected in his honor. Augustus encouraged the cult as a unifying element in his diverse empire and as a type of patriotism. After his death, temples were built in his honor, and the symbols of divinity were transferred to succeeding emperors. For decades, all new temples were made for the imperial cult.

Gaius Caesar, nicknamed Caligula (AD 37–41), was the first emperor to be worshiped in Rome during his own lifetime. On hearing of a dispute between Jews and Gentiles over worshiping him in Jamnia, he ordered a statue of himself placed in the temple in Jerusalem. His plan, which would have caused a major revolt among the Jews, was averted only by the intercession of Herod Agrippa I. Under the succeeding emperors Claudius (AD 41–54) and Nero (AD 54–68), the cult reached ridiculous extremes. Domitian (AD 81–96) also decreed that he should be worshiped as “God the Lord.” Later emperors varied in how seriously they took the imperial cult, but it remained a test of loyalty to the Empire. For the sake of the Empire’s unity, other religions had to accommodate emperor worship one way or another.

Emperor worship understandably caused problems for Christians, since the titles given to the emperor (“Lord,” “Prince of Peace,” “Son of God,” “Savior”) were the same as those used for Christ. The confession “Jesus is Lord” (Rom 10:9) was bound to conflict with the claim “Caesar is Lord.” Christians who would not sacrifice to the emperor were charged with treason. The accusation against the Christians in Thessalonica started when they accused Paul and Silas of having “caused trouble all over the world . . . and now they are here disturbing our city” (Acts 17:6). They also accused the Christian workers of violating the decrees of Caesar (“They are all guilty of treason against Caesar,” Acts 17:7). These decrees had been issued during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius and were still in effect when Claudius ruled. They prohibited predicting anyone’s death, especially that of the emperor. Paul and Silvanus had come to the city proclaiming Jesus Christ’s supreme kingship; from their perspective, this appeared to predict an end to the emperor’s reign (2:3-8; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:16).

The Thessalonian believers had experienced hostility from the time of their conversion (1 Thess 1:6; 2:14), which was something Paul and Silvanus had repeatedly warned them would happen (1 Thess 3:3-4). The apostles had anxiety about whether the Thessalonians would be able to keep the faith despite Satan’s temptation to give it up (1 Thess 3:5). To their credit, the Thessalonians had stood firm in faith, love, and persevering hope. This was noticed and commended by the apostles in the first epistle (1 Thess 3:6-8) and again in the second (1:3). Paul and Silvanus were so pleased with their faithful endurance that they held up the Thessalonians as an example to other churches (1:3-4).

In 2 Thessalonians 1:5, the writers make the startling statement that the Thessalonians’ suffering persecution was a manifestation of the righteous judgment of God. To our way of thinking, “the fact of suffering seems to deny, rather than to

prove, that God is working out his righteous purpose" (Morris 1991:196). The thought in 2 Thessalonians 1:5 is quite similar to that in Philippians 1:27-28, where Paul indicates that the perseverance of the believers undergoing suffering is a sign of their salvation. Suffering tries believers and transforms them into the image of Christ, which is the goal of salvation. Therefore, when trials come to the Christian, they come from the hand of God as the means of making believers what they ought to be. These sufferings make the believers worthy members of God's Kingdom (see note on 1:5).

The teaching of enduring persecution completely accords with Jesus' eschatological messages in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, wherein he made it plain that the believers need to remain faithful during great days of tribulation—with the promise that those who endure to the end will be saved (Matt 24:13; Mark 13:13). The same message runs through the book of Revelation: Those who remain faithful to Christ during tribulation, even if it means suffering martyrdom, will receive a great reward (see Rev 20:4-6). Modern Christians who teach that believers will escape by being raptured prior to the Tribulation are wishful dreamers. There is no such teaching in the New Testament. Nowhere can I find a verse that indicates that believers will be raptured prior to the Tribulation and that the coming of the Lord will then follow. (For more on this, see commentary below on 2 Thess 2.) The teaching of the New Testament consistently presents the view that the believers will undergo persecution until the coming of the Lord. This, in fact, is what Paul and Silvanus were telling the Thessalonians.

After commending the Thessalonians for enduring persecution, the writers assured them that their persecutors would experience terrible judgment at the coming of the Lord and that the Lord would give them relief from their suffering (1:6-10). Christ would come to destroy the enemies of the gospel and to deliver the persecuted believers, who would receive rest from their trials and the reward of being honored by Christ, as well as glorifying him. The apostles believed that Jesus would return soon (within their own lifetimes) to judge the persecutors of Christ's people and rescue the believers. After this dramatic separation of unbelievers from believers, the Lord would establish his Kingdom on earth wherein he would be glorified in and among his holy people.

Paul and Silvanus spoke of a horrible end to those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. They would experience eternal destruction and separation from the Lord. The language is left vague as to what this entails: Is it speaking of complete annihilation or eternal torment? In Paul's writings we do not find any notion of eternal punishment *per se*; rather, Paul speaks of death as being the ultimate end for those who reject the gospel. It is true and dreadful that other portions of the New Testament speak of eternal torment and punishment (Matt 25:46; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 16:24-25; 2 Pet 2:9; Rev 14:10; 20:10), but Paul's theology views rejection of the gospel as spelling one's destruction, without saying what form this takes.

In stark contrast to those who will suffer separation from the Lord's presence, the holy ones of God will be indwelt by Christ's glorious presence and express him to

the world. This glorification of Christ through his people will happen at the time of Jesus' coming (Rom 8:17-18). For now, Christ is hidden, and his glory is hidden inside his people. But on the day of the Parousia he will be fully glorified through his people (Col 3:4). While the glory of his might will overwhelm unbelievers, the glory of his splendor expressed through his people will incite awe.

The final and very significant point to make about the end of this section (1:8-12) is that the writers attributed to Jesus the status of deity. The Lord Jesus (who is clearly the subject of 1:8ff) is presented as the one who will come to execute eternal destruction upon people who will be forever separated from the Lord and his glorious power (1:9). Such actions were attributed to Yahweh by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 2:10, 19, 21). Furthermore, 1:10 speaks of the day when he will come to be glorified in his holy people. The day is none other than the Day of the Lord, which also echoes Isaiah 2:11, 17, LXX. And the idea of God being glorified in his holy ones may come from the Septuagint rendering of Psalm 89:7 (88:8 in LXX), which reads "God will be glorified in the council of his holy ones." These actions attributed to Jesus are theophanic (Bruce 1982:152).

When the writers offered a prayer to God at the end of this chapter (1:11-12), they asked for a blessing of grace that comes from "our God and Lord, Jesus Christ" (see extensive note on 1:12). In saying this, they were attributing deity to Jesus. He is both God and Lord. It is his name—the Lord Jesus—that will be glorified in his holy ones in the coming Kingdom. Jesus has the Name that is above every name—the name that every tongue should confess (Phil 2:9-11) because he is God incarnate (John 1:1, 14; Phil 2:6). The early Christians proclaimed Jesus' name, preached his name, and healed the sick by the power of his name (see Acts 4:7-18; 8:12; 9:28). They were willing to suffer for his name (see Acts 5:28, 40; 15:26), and even die for his name (see Acts 21:13). In an era when the Caesars were being deified and hailed as God, Christians, at great risk, were proclaiming that Jesus is God. They were scoffed at and persecuted for doing so. But at the end of this age, the vindication will come. Christ will be so manifest in his many children (Rom 8:17-21) that Christ's divine name will be glorified thereby.

◆ III. The Parousia of Jesus and the Parousia of the Lawless One (2:1-12)

Now, dear brothers and sisters,* let us clarify some things about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we will be gathered to meet him. ²Don't be so easily shaken or alarmed by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Don't believe them, even if they claim to have had a spiritual vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us. ³Don't be fooled by what they say. For that day will not come until there is a great rebellion

against God and the man of lawlessness* is revealed—the one who brings destruction.* ⁴He will exalt himself and defy everything that people call god and every object of worship. He will even sit in the temple of God, claiming that he himself is God.

⁵Don't you remember that I told you about all this when I was with you? ⁶And you know what is holding him back, for he can be revealed only when his time comes. ⁷For this lawlessness is already at work



Philemon

PETER H. DAVIDS

INTRODUCTION TO *Philemon*

PAUL'S SHORT LETTER to Philemon is normally placed at the end of the Pauline canon because it is the shortest of his works. In fact, it is about the same length as Jude, each having 25 verses; only 2 and 3 John are shorter. Because of its length, one rarely finds a commentary devoted entirely to Philemon (Stuhlmacher 1975, Barth and Blanke 2000 are happy exceptions). Despite its brevity, the letter is a fascinating glimpse into the world of the early church in the Roman province of Asia.

AUTHOR

Few scholars have doubted the genuineness of Philemon as one of the letters of the apostle Paul (Barth and Blanke 2000:103). The only major exception has been the Tübingen school (second half of the 19th century). While Philemon is too short to apply any stylistic tests, its straightforward theme, lack of specific theological issues, and inclusion of many personal details make it unlikely that anyone other than a person with the authentic concern it addresses would have invented such a letter. The issue for most scholars is not whether Paul wrote the letter, but when he and Timothy wrote it.

DATE AND OCCASION OF WRITING

The date and place of writing make virtually no difference to the interpretation of the letter. However, it is of some import in placing it within the Pauline corpus, which in turn impacts the dates and occasions of other Pauline writings, which then impacts their interpretations, most notably among them being Colossians. The letter to Philemon was clearly written by Paul when he was in prison (v. 1) and Timothy was not. But Paul was "often" in prison (2 Cor 11:23), and we know nothing more about most of these imprisonments other than that. In the case of Philemon, we know that the imprisonment and the writing of the letter must have occurred during or after Paul's ministry in the Roman province of Asia (i.e., when Paul's base was in Ephesus), for Philemon lived in the eastern part of that province and Paul was unlikely to have known him until he had worked there. The two known imprisonments that fit that time frame are those in Caesarea and Rome. Although supported by some scholars (Reicke 2001:73-75), the Caesarean imprisonment is unlikely, for (1) Paul appears to have had less freedom there and (2) Palestine is both far from Colosse and not the natural direction to go for a fugitive slave (if that

is what Onesimus was) fleeing from Asia. That leaves Rome as the other known imprisonment, but that also has the issue of its being a long and difficult trip from Colosse, including at least one and probably two journeys by ship. Therefore, other scholars suggest that Paul may have been imprisoned in Ephesus at the end of his time there. While hypothetical, such an imprisonment would not be surprising given Paul's frequency of ending up in jail (cf. 2 Cor 1:8-9; Paul's references to life-threatening circumstances in Asia might or might not include imprisonment). It would also be far closer to where Philemon lived than Rome was and so easier for a fugitive slave to reach (Stuhlmacher 1975:21). How shall we decide between these two options?

Two other pieces of information that Paul provides may help us: (1) He was an "old man" (v. 9), and "Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke" were with him (v. 24). If we accept the information found in 2 Timothy as genuine, at some time during Paul's Roman imprisonment Demas left (2 Tim 4:10) and Mark had not yet arrived (2 Tim 4:11), although Luke was already there. There is no mention of Aristarchus in 2 Timothy. Mark had apparently worked with Paul earlier, for 2 Timothy 4:11 mentions that he was helpful to Paul, something that Paul did not think initially (see Acts 15:37-39). Aristarchus appears to have traveled with Paul on his third missionary journey and also on his trip to Rome (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2). Furthermore, at some point he was "in prison with [Paul]" (cf. Col 4:10; possibly in Rome, but likely in the same place where Philemon was written); and Mark, Demas, and Luke were also, at some point, in the city where Paul was in prison (Col 4:14). Since all of these men sent greetings to Philemon, it is likely that they had been part of Paul's team for at least part of the time he was ministering in Ephesus. The result of this survey of the data is that if we assume that 2 Timothy gives us accurate data on Paul's companions, it is difficult to fit Philemon into a Roman setting. However, if we hypothesize that Mark came to Rome, left, and then later returned, then the earlier part of Paul's time in Rome is the likely time of Philemon's writing (i.e., c. AD 62). However, given that this traditional Roman setting requires that Mark and probably Aristarchus left and then returned and, further, given that Paul expected to visit Philemon in the near future (v. 22), I suggest a date around AD 56 and an imprisonment in Asia (Ephesus) as the more likely setting. Still, I recognize that any determination of the place of imprisonment is no more than an educated guess.

AUDIENCE

It has been argued by Knox (1959) and more recently by Winter (1987) that Philemon was not written to Colosse but is the "lost" letter to Laodicea (Col 4:16). They go on to argue that even though it is addressed to the whole church and Philemon and Apphia are leaders in that church, Archippus is the main addressee of the letter instead of Philemon. Thus, the letter is to be read in Colosse as well as Laodicea to put more pressure on Archippus to accede to Paul's request (v. 2; cf. Col 4:17). The thesis has not garnered significant support among other scholars (O'Brien 1982:266). While the argument is fascinating and reminds us that there is

a lot that we do not know about Paul's letters, it is ultimately unconvincing for two reasons. First, even though Paul is being persuasive, to have the letter read in two different churches would surely be to put the type of pressure upon the recipient that Paul denies that he is doing. Second, "the church that meets in your house" of verse 2 would not normally be read as referring just to Archippus's house since there is nothing to set off Archippus from Philemon and Apphia. Instead, it reads as if Philemon is the *paterfamilias* and the other two are indeed church leaders but also part of his household, with the "your" being singular and referring to Philemon.

The letter ostensibly has a primary audience of one person, Philemon. We know nothing about Philemon except what we can glean from this letter. He was a resident of Colosse, a man of enough means to own at least one slave. Apphia and Archippus were also greeted in the letter (probably Philemon's wife and son, respectively). We do not know a lot about Philemon's social position in Colosse, but we know more about his status in the church. Paul greeted Philemon as a co-worker and Archippus as a fellow soldier (cf. Col 4:12; Phil 2:25). Such titles were not used lightly by Paul. They designate people who had worked together with him, that is, whom he had apprenticed to himself and who had proved themselves as Christian leaders. Since Paul had probably not yet visited Colosse (Col 2:1), Philemon and Archippus must have spent time with Paul elsewhere, perhaps in Ephesus, roughly 120 miles to the west. Philemon had since returned to Colosse and was now the host and leader of a house church (v. 2) and had a significant influence in the larger group of house churches (v. 7), probably in part because he was generous with his means—that is, he functioned in the cultural role of benefactor or patron.

Yet the picture is not as simple as the portrait above suggests. While in Colossians Epaphras is Paul's connection to Colosse (Col 1:7; 4:12), in Philemon only Onesimus is mentioned as linking Paul to Colosse. Epaphras is mentioned (v. 23) but only as one of several sending greetings. Was Epaphras not involved with Philemon's particular house church prior to this time, or are these differences due to the ostensibly private nature of the letter? Possibly so, but the letter is certainly not just a private correspondence between Paul and Philemon concerning Onesimus. Even if Philemon's family and the church in his house had not been addressed, given that most people could not read and that even a person like Philemon may well have had the letter read to him, and given that letters were not that common, the arrival of a letter would have been a significant semipublic event. The whole church would have wanted to hear the letter, especially when they learned that part of this church was addressed. Furthermore, the letter carrier would have been expected to expand upon what was written in the letter and to comment on the situation of Paul and his co-workers. The letter to Philemon primarily addressed one man, but it did so before at least his house church and probably before the whole church in Colosse. We do not know how many house churches there were in Colosse, but there were at least two and quite possibly several more. The Christians did not live separately from the community of believers to which they belonged.

Some go farther than this and argue that Philemon was not a private letter that would have been publicly known or even read in public; they argue that it was intended as a public letter. Patzia (1993:705-706) and Winter (1987:1-2) argue that the inclusion of the church in the address and the large number of commercial and legal terms in the letter, among other items, suggest that it was intended as a public letter, although Llewelyn (2005:263) cautions that comparing the legal terminology with papyri that are primarily legal or commercial may skew our reading. What is clear is that the letter was not intended to be kept private, for at a minimum the greeting to the church would raise inquiries about the content of the letter. It is longer than most private letters of the time, but, on the other hand, while the drama may be played out before the church, the church is not specifically addressed. In my view it is better to read it as a private letter but to realize that private did not mean that Philemon was to keep it to himself. His private affairs affected the church, and his reputation before the church was at stake, so the private-public line is very much blurred.

CANONICITY AND TEXTUAL HISTORY

It is possible that the Epistle to Philemon is referred to multiple times in Ignatius's epistle *To the Ephesians* 2-6, although none of the references are so clear as to be undisputable. Likewise, it is not certain that Onesimus, bishop of Ephesus, to whom Ignatius repeatedly refers, is the Onesimus our letter mentions. The name was relatively common. If Ignatius does refer to the letter, then it was known and used by AD 100. What is clear is that Philemon was part of the Pauline corpus that Marcion used (about AD 140; Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5.21). It was also part of the Muratorian Canon (AD 200). Thus, it is probable that this work was part of the earliest collection of Paul's works, and we can be certain that it had a secure place in the Pauline corpus by the mid-second century. Its presence in the canon was never disputed. It is found in papyri from the late second century on (specifically, P46 and P87), as well as in Codices Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus. (Codex Vaticanus lacks several books at the end of the NT, including Philemon.) There are relatively few textual issues in the letter.

LITERARY STYLE

Philemon was a carefully written letter in proper epistolary form. Thus, we have an opening, including a salutation and thanksgiving, then the body of the letter, and finally the closing of the letter, including greetings and a blessing. These reflect the principal parts of a typical Greek letter. However, Philemon belongs to a particular type of Greek letters that we may term "letters of intercession." While no other early Christian examples are known, 40 to 50 years later, the younger Pliny would write a similar letter to his friend Sabinianus on behalf of a freed slave (Pliny, *Letters* 9.21, 24; see text in Stowers 1986:160). We also have two similar letters from the fourth and fifth centuries, both from Christians (see Deissmann 1927:184-185; Barth and Blanke 2000:87). In other words, this type of letter was not unknown in the ancient

behavior, most in that society would have felt it appropriate to make an example of him. In Roman society, such punishment could range from putting off or canceling the hope of manumission to whipping, branding, or, in some cases, crucifixion. The Greek world did not manumit as frequently, so corporal punishment was even more likely. Since Onesimus's return was voluntary and Philemon would lose his investment in Onesimus if he killed him, corporal punishment might well be limited. Yet it still could be severe and disfiguring. Both Philemon's own social background and the expectations of his peers would pressure him to carry out some type of punishment. Paul's goal in the letter was to reframe the situation so that Philemon felt he had a better reason to forgive than to punish. With this in mind, Paul's letter is a long argument for forgiving one who has wronged us, and as such it applies to us today even in our very different social milieu.

OUTLINE

The outline of Philemon is easy to discern. It fits into the pattern of a typical Christian letter of the period.

- I. Opening of the Letter (vv. 1-7)
 - A. Salutation (vv. 1-3)
 - B. Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer (vv. 4-7)
- II. Paul's Appeal for Onesimus (vv. 8-22)
- III. Paul's Final Greetings (vv. 23-25)

COMMENTARY ON
Philemon

◆ I. Opening of the Letter (vv. 1-7)
A. Salutation (vv. 1-3)

This letter is from Paul, a prisoner for preaching the Good News about Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy.

I am writing to Philemon, our beloved co-worker,² and to our sister Apphia, and

to our fellow soldier Archippus, and to the church that meets in your* house.

³May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

² Throughout this letter, *you* and *your* are singular except in verses 3, 22, and 25.

NOTES

1 Paul, a prisoner for preaching the Good News about Christ Jesus. Instead of referring to himself as an “apostle” or some other more exalted title, Paul referred to himself as a prisoner, a title he used three other times: Eph 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tim 1:8. Paul referred to himself as Christ Jesus’ prisoner, however, not a prisoner of Rome (his legal status). The expression “for preaching the Good News about” is an explanatory expansion that describes why Paul had been imprisoned, but one should not let it distract from the main point: Paul’s status as a prisoner. A more rigidly literal translation would be “prisoner of Jesus Christ,” which can mean “a prisoner because of Jesus Christ” as in the NLT or “Jesus Christ’s prisoner.” That is to say, it is not the government that has Paul there, but Jesus Christ

co-worker. The same title is also used for Priscilla and Aquila (Rom 16:3), Urbanus (Rom 16:9), Timothy (Rom 16:21; 1 Thess 3:2), and others (Phil 2:25; 4:3; Col 4:11), as well as the colleagues mentioned in v. 24. It denotes an associate or apprentice of Paul and thus indicates the rank of Philemon in Paul’s eyes.

2 our sister Apphia. The earliest and best mss (Ⲛ A D* F G I P 048 0278 33 1739) read “sister.” A later tradition found in the manuscripts behind the KJV (D² 044 ℞) read “beloved.” “Sister,” adopted by the NLT, is the far better reading.

our fellow soldier Archippus. While Archippus is mentioned in Col 4:17, this title is only found here and in Phil 2:25, where it is paired with “co-worker” as a title for Epaphroditus. Thus, it indicates that Archippus was at some point Paul’s co-worker.

the church that meets in your house. The early church met in the homes of various members. Since the meetings were centered on a common meal, which recalls the last meal Jesus ate with his disciples, the groups could not be larger than the home could accommodate for eating, between 9 and 18 people, depending on the size of the house, perhaps up to 30 adults when necessary (Banks 1988:41-42; Stuhlmacher 1975:70-75; Smith 2003:22-27). Several such house churches together made up a city church (such as that addressed in Colossians). The Pauline city churches were led by a team of elders. It is likely that Philemon was part of this team, and it is clear that he was at least the patron of the church meeting in his home.

3 *grace and peace.* The normal Greek salutation was “greetings” (*chairein* [T⁶5463, Z⁶5897]), which sounds similar to the Greek word for “grace” (*charis* [T⁶5485, Z⁶5921]). The normal Jewish greeting was *shalom* [T^H7965, Z^H8934] (peace). Paul’s letters combine the two as a matter of form. While Christianized, they probably do not mean more than the initial “Dear” in an English letter, since they might have become standard usage for a Christian letter in Paul’s day.

COMMENTARY

When Paul opened the letter, he avoided the term “apostle” with its overtones of authority and chose the title “prisoner” because that would incite pity, or “pathos,” would show his need, and would give him a status parallel to that of Onesimus (v. 1). In this letter Paul was not only interceding for Onesimus but also identifying with him and, as we shall see later, substituting for him. As Paul does for another person what Christ has done for him (admittedly on a much larger and deeper scale) we see Christ’s identification with humanity being lived out by Paul, one of Christ’s best apprentices.

The letter addresses Philemon, who himself was a co-worker of Paul. We do not know when and where this took place, but it is quite possible that it was during Paul’s long stay in Ephesus, since that city was relatively near to Colosse. Despite the personal nature of the issue at hand, Paul did not address Philemon in isolation, but included Timothy on his end and two others, Apphia and Archippus (perhaps Philemon’s wife and son respectively), along with the whole house church on Philemon’s end (v. 2). Paul did not view Christianity as a matter of individual choice and relationship with God but as a transfer of citizenship from one kingdom or community into another. Thus, Paul always surrounded himself with apprentices who became his co-workers, and he always addressed individuals within the context of their church community. Issues and relationships are not to be worked out individually but within the context of the community that gives insight, support, and context to the process.

Finally, we are reminded that the church context in the New Testament was not that of a gathering of 50 to 100 individuals sitting in rows and staring at what is happening “up front,” but that of a house church, a small group of up to 20 or so individuals who would have come to know one another intimately. There was no back row that one could sit in but rather a circle around a table from which they shared a full meal. The struggle we sometimes have today in applying the New Testament letters may come in part from the fact that our context differs from that of the early Pauline churches. We either withdraw into our individualism or else are submerged into a group so large that we may never be in intimate relationships with one another. Some churches reclaim the Pauline sense of church through small groups, which are effective so long as they function as safe places where one can develop intimate relationships. Thus, the term “church” needs to be defined within Paul’s theological and experiential understanding if we are to grasp its meaning in his letters.

◆ B. Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer (vv. 4-7)

⁴I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon, ⁵because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people. ⁶And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ. ⁷Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people.

NOTES

5 faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people. While it is quite possible to read *pistis* [T⁶4102, Z⁶4411] as referring to trust/faithfulness/loyalty toward both Jesus and God's people (Bruce 1984:208), most likely the NLT is correct translating it as "faith" (in Jesus), that is, commitment to Jesus. What we have in the Greek is a literary form called a chiasmus: love is mentioned first, then faith, then Jesus, then God's people in an A B B' A' pattern. That love is placed first is an unusual order for Paul (cf. Col 1:4); he did it here because love will be Paul's emphasis in the letter (Stuhlmacher 1975:32-33; Patzia 1990:108-109).

6 generosity. There are a number of interpretations of the Greek term *koinōnia* [T⁶2842, Z⁶3126], from "fellowship," either with Christ (Stuhlmacher 1975:33) or other believers (Lohmeyer 1956:178; Wall 1993:198-199; Dunn 1996:318-219), to the notion of "sharing," "almsgiving," and "generosity." It is difficult to decide which meaning is intended; Barth and Blanke (2000:282-283) argue that the ambiguity is deliberate and each of these meanings is included. Most likely, however, Lightfoot (1896:333) and Bruce (1984:208-209) are correct that Philemon's generosity is intended. This is the meaning of a parallel expression in Phil 1:5, "because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now" (NRSV), with Phil 4:18-20 making it clear that this means financial support, and this meaning fits best with the theme of the letter.

I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ. Paul prays that Philemon will have or increase in the generosity that flows from trust in Christ. Then he also prays that this will take place in the context of experience or understanding. In order to make sense of Paul's clause we have to add "I am praying," which is implied from a previous part of the complex sentence. But the stress is on the idea of "generosity that comes from your faith."

all the good things we have in Christ. There is a textual problem here in that a significant selection of mss read "you" (P⁶¹ X P 33 1739 it^{a,b} syr cop) rather than "we." The NLT correctly chooses the more difficult "we" that is supported by a widespread group of mss: A C D 044 048^{vid} M^l syr^{hmg}. However, the real issue is how to understand this phrase. The "good things" Philemon is to understand are at the least the good things that we have as a result of our trust in Christ and specifically the good things that we receive due to our generosity (so 2 Cor 9:8-10; see note on "generosity" above). The NLT correctly conveys that they are the good things that come to us either as a result of our faith in Christ (taking the Greek *eis* [T⁶1519, Z⁶1650] as *en* [T⁶1722, Z⁶1877]) or as a means of drawing us closer to Christ (accepting the *eis* as having a telic force).

7 refreshed the hearts of God's people. This is a good idiomatic English translation of the Greek phrase, which speaks of refreshing the guts or entrails of God's people. In the ancient world it was thought that the entrails were the seat of emotions, probably because we tend to experience the effects of strong emotions in our gastrointestinal tracts.

COMMENTARY

It was customary in a Greek letter to thank one or more gods for the well-being of the person addressed. Paul normally expanded this customary section in his letters, as he did here (vv. 4-5). In this letter the thanksgiving itself is quite short, but Paul transitioned into a prayer that is part prayer and part affirmation of those very qualities in Philemon that will be required for meeting Paul's request (vv. 6-7).

Unfortunately for us, Paul's expression of this thanksgiving is very complicated. In fact, verse 6 is so complicated that commentators differ significantly, and many are not at all certain of their interpretations. It is truly one of the more obscure verses in the New Testament. Having admitted this, I will nevertheless dare to give my view of what Paul was expressing.

While the thanksgiving section was a formal part of the letter, Paul's life was normally characterized by thankfulness, especially thankfulness for those in the churches he influenced who were doing well. This thankfulness was appropriate for Paul, since he could not conceive of a person really understanding what Christ had done, was doing, and would do in the future for him or her without that resulting in a deep, heartfelt thankfulness, a thankfulness that was multiplied as one looked on what Christ was doing in others in the churches, as well. It was out of thankfulness that Paul continually prayed for his friends in the faith. Paul's thankfulness was triggered by the reports he repeatedly received (perhaps through Epaphras or others) of Philemon's trust in Christ and love toward others, a love that was expressed in generosity (v. 6). Those who trust in Christ should indeed be generous, for they should be inspired by Christ's generosity and feel secure in him and thus able to share generously with others. A lack of generosity is, in fact, indicative of a lack of true trust in Christ. This is a theme that Paul expands upon in 2 Corinthians 8-9.

Paul's response to what he heard about Philemon was, "More, Lord." He wanted this generosity (flowing from Philemon's faith) to increase and to work itself out in an understanding flowing from experience, an understanding of the good things we have from Christ that draw us closer to him. In our rationalistic Western world we often want to know and understand before we will risk and act. Our motto is "Understanding before action." Paul and Jesus thought differently. First, one needs to do the right thing (in this case allow trust in Christ to work itself out in generosity) and then that will produce its effects, one of which will be new insights into all the good things we have from Christ (such as a new level of intimacy with him, a new revelation of his nature, or a new experience of his provision). This, in turn, will increase our commitments and draw us closer to Christ. The cycle of knowledge-risk-deeper knowledge is something that Paul would pray for us as well as for Philemon. Thus, his and Jesus' motto was "Obedience brings understanding."

At this point, the prayer ended, and Paul made a comment. The reports he had heard and his own contact with Philemon had given him joy and comfort (v. 7). We can picture him sitting in prison and smiling as he thought about what he had heard about Philemon. For the moment, the problems of imprisonment were forgotten, as he savored deep satisfaction. And what did Paul hear? He heard about Philemon's

loving deeds (the NT is rarely if ever concerned with our feelings toward one another, but it is very concerned that we act lovingly toward one another). And Paul also heard how the hearts of God's people were encouraged through these loving deeds. It is because he was so aware of Philemon's character that Paul could move on to make a request that would stretch Philemon to new levels of loving action.

◆ II. Paul's Appeal for Onesimus (vv. 8-22)

⁸That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do. ⁹But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me—Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus.*

¹⁰I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison. ¹¹Onesimus* hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. ¹²I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

¹³I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf. ¹⁴But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced. ¹⁵It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while

so that you could have him back forever.

¹⁶He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

¹⁷So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

¹⁸If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹I, PAUL, WRITE THIS WITH MY OWN HAND: I WILL REPAY IT. AND I WON'T MENTION THAT YOU OWE ME YOUR VERY SOUL!

²⁰Yes, my brother, please do me this favor* for the Lord's sake. Give me this encouragement in Christ.

²¹I am confident as I write this letter that you will do what I ask and even more!

²²One more thing—please prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that God will answer your prayers and let me return to you soon.

9 Or a prisoner of Christ Jesus. 11 Onesimus means "useful." 20 Greek *onaimen*, a play on the name Onesimus.

NOTES

8 boldly asking a favor. In the NLT, the term "boldly" is attached to the wrong part of the sentence. In Greek the boldness or authority that Paul has is a boldness to *command* Philemon to do "the right thing," not a boldness to ask a favor, which comes in the next verse and is not connected to the term for boldness. Paul said that instead of boldly commanding, he was instead appealing (a stronger term than asking a favor). He was taking a "one-down" position, that of a slave, rather than a superior (i.e., a "one-up" position). So we might translate this, "although I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty . . ." or "although I have enough boldness in Christ to command you to do your duty, instead I would rather appeal to you (or 'beg you to do me a favor') on the basis of love."

9 old man. The Greek term is *presbutēs* [T64246, Z64566]. Lightfoot (1896:336-337), followed by Bruce (1984:211-212) and O'Brien (1982:290), argue that this should be translated "ambassador," which differs by only one letter in Greek (*presbutēs* [T64242.1, Z64562]). The latter was sometimes interchanged with the word *presbutēs* [T64246, Z64566] (old man),