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Dictionary
OF Paul
AND HIS
Letters

Editors:

Gerald F. Hawthorne

Ralph P. Martin

Associate Editor:

Daniel G. Reid

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der house arrest (Acts 24:23). Both Felix and his wife, Drusilla, a Jewess, heard Paul speak about faith in Christ, but ultimately Felix seemed more interested in improving his own lot. Luke tells us that, as a favor to the Jews, Paul was forced to remain a prisoner for about two years. Moreover, Felix consulted with Paul frequently, hoping that Paul would ultimately give him a bribe (Acts 24:24-27).

In the first century AD, a provincial administrator's power was limited only by the emperor. Hence he had enormous freedom to dispense justice as arbitrarily as he liked, just so long as he did not fall foul of the emperor. But there was one exception to this "unlimited" freedom—the *leges repetundarum* ("laws against extortion"), the first of which, the *Lex Calpurnia* of 149 B.C., stipulated that a governor could be as harsh and arbitrary as he liked, but he could not extort property or money from provincials. The law, of course, assumed an abuse of power. Felix seems to have contented himself with a delicate political balancing act. On the one hand, he was eager to hear Paul expound Christianity. On the other, he satisfied the Jews by keeping Paul a prisoner while trying to extort money from him without being obvious about it.

When Festus replaced Felix as governor, much the same situation prevailed. He seemed eager to resolve the standoff that had existed for two years until he too held a hearing first in Jerusalem and then in Caesarea (Acts 25:1-8). The Jews in attendance asked that a new trial be held in Jerusalem, all the while planning to kill Paul (Acts 25:2). Luke never tells us if Paul knew of the plot, but when he was confronted with the suggestion that he stand trial in Jerusalem, Paul appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:9-11). In the hearing *extra ordinem* the governor could have freed Paul, since neither he nor King Agrippa at a later hearing could find any crime on which Paul could be convicted (Acts 25:25; 26:31). However, beneath it all is Luke's assertion that Festus, like Felix, was eager to do the Jews a favor (Acts 25:3, 9).

In the end Festus too chose the politically expedient course. He could find no wrong in Paul. In fact, both he and Agrippa, with Agrippa's wife, gave Paul a wide-ranging hearing. Festus satisfied the Jews by sending Paul out of the country to Rome and, by doing so, he protected the apostle from the Jews. Underlying all of Luke's narrative is (1) the Jews' relentless efforts to neutralize the effects of Paul's ministry by putting him to death if necessary; (2) Paul's careful adherence to Roman law; (3) Paul's innocence of charges brought by the Jews; and (4) the moral and legal expediency of the Roman rulers of Judea.

3.9. *Rome*. The book of Acts ends with the notation

that Paul was placed under house arrest in Rome while he was awaiting trial. There he lived in rented quarters with a single soldier as his guard (Acts 28:16, 30; Phil 1:13-17). He would have been under the jurisdiction of the praetorian guard while he awaited trial. He could have been heard by the emperor himself or a high official delegated by the emperor to act on his behalf. There is no indication that Paul ever appeared in court at Rome. More than likely he was released, as were many others during the reign of Claudius and the early years of Nero's rule, as a show of clemency at a time when there was a large backlog of appeals to the emperor. It is much less likely that his case was dismissed on the grounds that his accusers did not appear. Roman law was heavily biased in favor of a trial. The weight of the law fell on accusers to appear in court. Cases were not often dismissed because of the absence of one's accusers.

We can only speculate regarding Acts' ending without stating the outcome of Paul's appeal to Caesar. Certainly Luke had made the point that the early Christians scrupulously adhered to Roman law in the face of relentless Jewish legal persecution and Roman political vacillation in the complicated region of Judea.

See also ATHENS, PAUL AT; CITIZENSHIP, ROMAN AND HEAVENLY; CIVIL AUTHORITY; EMPERORS, ROMAN; LAW-SUIT; POLITICAL SYSTEMS; PRISON, PRISONER.

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A. A. Rupprecht

LEGALISM. See LAW; WORKS OF THE LAW.

LETTERS, LETTER FORMS

The Greek word *epistolē* ("epistle," "letter") originally referred to an oral communication sent by a messenger. The term *letters* was a broad designation for different types of documents in the ancient world, and could include a great variety of commercial, governmental and legal documents, as well as political and military reports, along with other sorts of correspondence, especially of a personal kind. Paul adapted the

Greco-Roman letter models for Christian purposes. His letters, which have fascinated people for generations, were usually constructed along lines similar to that of Hellenistic letters. But the apostle,* who had a sense of freedom in literary matters, was not tied to fixed models, and he often combined non-Jewish Hellenistic customs with Hellenistic Jewish ones.

1. Private Personal Letters?
2. The Form of the Pauline Letters
3. The Use of Other Literary Traditions

1. Private Personal Letters?

Since Deissmann's distinction between "letters" (which were understood as natural, daily and situational) and "epistles" (which were understood as mechanical, artistic and literary), there has been considerable scholarly discussion as to whether Paul's letters should be regarded as "private personal letters" or not. They were certainly private as opposed to *literary essays*, which adopted an epistolary form but were written for an unspecified, universal audience, and *official letters*, which were not written in the context of a personal relationship. Galatians,* for example, is a highly personal letter written to a specific group of people in an immediate relationship with Paul. However inclusive is the address, "the churches of Galatia," this letter was sent to a relatively minor group in the Greco-Roman world (Hansen).

But Paul's letters were "more than private." He wrote self-consciously as an apostle, that is, as a representative of the risen Christ* (note the emphasis on apostleship in Gal 1:1, 15, 16; 5:2) in order to instruct, give advice, encourage and reprimand (note 1 Thess 5:27 and 2 Thess 3:14-15 regarding the impact on the church at Thessalonica*). Most of Paul's letters were addressed to communities of Christian believers and were intended for public use within the congregations. They were occasional, contextual writings addressing particular situations (though note Ephesians), and were the substitutes for Paul's personal presence (see *Itineraries*). He was concerned with the life situation of his readers, but never in the impersonal way characteristic of many Hellenistic letters. Paul treated each situation as unique and important. At the same time his letters set forth significant theological teaching and express a Christian understanding of life which reaches beyond the particular historical situation.

2. The Form of the Pauline Letters.

Many ancient letters, which were written by professional scribes, were highly stylized with each part basically determined by convention, regardless of the

occasion. The general model of the Hellenistic letter included an opening, a body and a closing. The basic Pauline letter form, in which there was a normal progression rather than any stereotyped or mechanical framework, contained the following elements:

2.1. Opening. Paul's letters, which follow the usual Hellenistic letter openings of "A to B, greetings," regularly contain expansions of this basic pattern (e.g., Rom 1:1-7; Gal 1:1-5; 1 Thess 1:1; Tit 1:1-4), and these often point to the specific purposes of the letters. The identification of the writer (with coworkers often named) and addressees is followed by expanded descriptions of both in terms of their standing in relation to God in Christ. Paul usually identifies himself with epithets such as "apostle" and "servant,"* while the addressees are called "saints," "beloved" or "the church* of God which is at . . ." The usual Hellenistic greeting, *chairein* ("greeting"), is replaced by *charis kai eirēnē* ("grace and peace"). This benediction* is both an affirmation regarding the grace* and peace* of God* in which they already participate, and a prayer* that they may appreciate and experience these blessings more fully.

2.2. Introductory Thanksgiving or Blessing. On occasion the more intimate letters of the Hellenistic period began with a thanksgiving to the gods for personal benefits received. Paul adopted this Hellenistic epistolary model, frequently using it at the beginning of his letters as he expressed his gratitude to God, the Father of Jesus Christ, for what God had effected in the lives of these predominantly Gentile* readers (e.g., 1 Cor 1:4; Phil 1:3; Col 1:3; 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Thess 1:3; Philem 4). But the apostle was no slavish imitator of this epistolary convention, since his structures were highly developed and sophisticated.

Two basic types of structure occurred in Paul's thanksgiving paragraphs (see *Benediction, Blessing, Doxology, Thanksgiving*). The first, which contained up to seven basic elements, began with the verb of thanksgiving and concluded with a *hina*-clause (or its equivalent) which spelled out the content of the apostle's intercession for the readers (Phil 1:3-11; Col 1:3-14; 1 Thess 1:2-3:13; 2 Thess 1:2-12; 2:13-14; Philem 4-7; cf. Eph 1:15-19). The second was simpler in form. It also commenced with the giving of thanks to God and concluded with a *hoti*-clause which noted the reason for this expression of gratitude (1 Cor 1:4-9; cf. Rom 1:8-10).

While the *structure* of the Pauline thanksgiving periods was Hellenistic, the *contents* (apart from their specifically Christian elements) showed the influence of the OT and Jewish thought. These paragraphs, which open with a statement of thanksgiving to God,

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have an epistolary function, that is, they introduce and present the main themes of their letters, usually setting the tone and atmosphere. Many have a didactic function so that either by fresh teaching or recall to instruction previously given the apostle sets forth theological matters he considers important (see esp. Col 1:9-14). An exhortatory purpose is also present in several of these passages (e.g., Phil 1:9-11). Further, the thanksgivings and petitions which are included give evidence of the apostle's deep pastoral and apostolic concern for the readers. At the same time Paul reports his *actual* thanksgivings and *actual* petitions for the readers (see Prayer).

Using a typically OT and Jewish prayer form denoting praise (cf. the doxological conclusions to the books of the Psalter: Ps 41:13; 72:19-20, etc.), Paul introduces two of his letters (2 Cor 1:3-4; Eph 1:3-14; cf. 1 Pet 1:3-5) with an introductory blessing or eulogy (*eulogētos*, "blessed"). While his introductory *thanksgivings* focus on God's work in the lives of others, his *eulogies* praise God for blessings in which he himself participates. The formula with a Jewish background was apparently more apt when he himself came within the circle of blessing.

2.3. Body. The bodies of Paul's letters show considerable variety, for it is here more than anywhere else that they reflect the different epistolary situations. Apparently, the apostle was more inclined to strike out on his own within the bodies of his letters and to be least bound by epistolary structures. There has been some difficulty in determining where the body section begins and ends (for example, in 1 and 2 Thess the body seems to have assimilated entirely to the thanksgiving). However, several possible openings have been identified through the *parakaleō* sentences ("I urge you my brothers," 1 Cor 1:10; 1 Thess 4:1; cf. Rom 12:1; 15:30), the disclosure formula ("I/we want you to know," Rom 1:13; Gal 1:11; Phil 1:12), the joy* expression (Philem 7), the expression of astonishment (Gal 1:6) or statement of compliance (Gal 1:8-9), while the close of the body was occasionally signalled by eschatological* conclusions (Rom 11:25-36; 1 Thess 3:11-13) or the travelog (see 2.4 below; see Itineraries).

The clustering of various epistolary formulas at certain strategic points signals significant breaks or turning points in the letter (Mullins). A distinct transition from a more didactic section to a lengthy section of paraenesis is occasionally signalled by a closing doxology and one of the transitional formulas (e.g., Rom 11:36—12:1; Eph 3:21—4:1; 1 Thess 3:11—4:1). Paraenetic or exhortatory materials were by and large traditional materials (they included "household tables": cf. Col 3:18—4:1; Eph 5:22—6:9), deriving from the

OT and Jewish literature as well as from Hellenistic moral traditions (cf. Phil 4:8-9; see Households and Household Codes).

Another typical feature of the bodies of Paul's letters is the "apostolic *parousia* (i.e., presence)," in which the apostle speaks of his travel plans, including his intention to be with his readers, and of his past and future contacts with them through his coworkers (1 Cor 4:17-21; 16:5-12; Phil 2:19-30; 1 Thess 2:17—3:11; Philem 22). Because he was unable to be with his readers, Paul's letters were a direct substitute for his personal presence, and were "to be accorded weight equal to [his] physical presence" (Doty).

Epistolary *topoi*, that is, themes and constituent motifs of ancient letters, appear also in Paul's letters. These include the themes of letter writing (Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 4:14), health (2 Cor 1:8-11; Phil 2:25-30), domestic events (1 Cor 5:1—6:11; Phil 4:2-4) and reunion with the addressees (Rom 15:14-33; 1 Thess 2:17—3:13).

2.4. Closing. Paul used the typical closing greetings of Hellenistic letters in order to link the congregations with his own traveling ministry (cf. Rom 16:3-16, 21-23; 2 Cor 13:12-13; Col 4:10-17). However, he did not include the customary health wish or Greek word of farewell. Instead, a benediction (1 Cor 16:23; Gal 6:16, 18; Eph 6:23-24; 2 Thess 3:16, 18) or doxology (Rom 16:25-27; Phil 4:20; cf. Heb 13:20-21) served the same function. The final benediction, which brings the letter to a definitive conclusion, often gives expression to Paul's strong desire (e.g., that the grace of the Lord Jesus may be with them, 1 Cor 16:24) and strikes a note of confidence.

Other closing conventions Paul used include references to his writing a phrase or two in his own hand (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17), his use of a secretary (Tertius, Rom 16:22; cf. Richards), and a holy kiss (e.g., Rom 16:16).

3. The Use of Other Literary Traditions.

Paul's letters exhibit not only a broad stylistic range; they also employ a variety of other literary traditions, including the contemporary rhetorical* forms and modes of persuasion, chiasmic structures, diatribe* style, midrashic exegetical methods where appeal is made to the authority of the OT, as well as early traditional hymnic* material and confessional formulas. Paul appears not to have been bound to any one stylistic convention, whether epistolary, sermonical or oratorical. The letter form which developed in the Pauline letters was richer than either the brief private letters or the more developed letter essays of Hellenism. We note briefly the following:

3.1. Liturgical Forms. The apostle's letters were intended to be read aloud to the congregations to whom they were addressed (1 Thess 5:27; Col 4:16). Perhaps this intended setting accounts for the inclusion of liturgical formulas in Christian letters. Recent scholarship suggests that the following belong to this category: (1) "grace"* benedictions, (2) blessings (Rom 1:25; 9:5), (3) doxologies (Rom 11:36; Gal 1:5), (4) hymns* (cf. Col 3:16) and (5) confessions and acclamations (Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; see Liturgical Elements).

3.2. Greco-Roman Rhetoric. Paul specifies his primary, apostolic task as the preaching of the gospel (Gal 1:16). When he writes his letters, he does so as a preacher of the gospel. His letters, though real, are nevertheless similar in many ways to oral speech. Accordingly, any epistolary analysis must be supplemented with a rhetorical analysis of his argumentation (see Rhetoric; Rhetorical Criticism). The persuasive modes of the classical rhetorical handbooks were well known during Paul's day, and one did not have to be formally trained in rhetoric to use them. Each type of speech could consist of four elements: (1) *exordium* (introduction), (2) *narratio* (statement of facts), (3) *probatio* (argument) and (4) *peroratio* (conclusion). The introduction and conclusion were intended to influence the audience by securing their interest and goodwill, and conclude by recapitulating the arguments and making an appeal. The body of the speech sought to establish the case. Most of the early Christian letters were written with a basically deliberative purpose. Apart from the opening and closing epistolary formulas, Paul's letters consist of three elements: in the first, which is conciliatory, he commends his readers for their past performance. The middle segment consists of advice, while the final section contains paraenesis (Aune).

Longenecker claims that in Galatians (as elsewhere in his letters) "Paul seems to have availed himself almost unconsciously of the rhetorical forms at hand, fitting them into his inherited epistolary structures and filling them out with such Jewish theological motifs and exegetical methods as would be particularly significant in countering what the Judaizers were telling his converts" (Longenecker, cxix).

See also BENEDICTION, BLESSING, DOXOLOGY, THANKSGIVING; DIATRIBE; HOUSEHOLDS AND HOUSEHOLD CODES; ITINERARIES, TRAVEL PLANS, JOURNEYS, APOSTOLIC PAROUSIA; HERMENEUTICS/INTERPRETING PAUL; LITURGICAL ELEMENTS; RHETORIC; TEACHING/PARAENESIS.

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P. T. O'Brien

LIBERATION. See FREEDOM/LIBERTY.

LIBERTY. See FREEDOM/LIBERTY.

LIFE AND DEATH

Paul uses the terms *life* and *death* in diverse contexts and with more than one referent. But broadly speaking, he sees life and death as opposed to one another, with life the gift from God and death the penalty of sin. Believers pass from the realm of death to life by dying with Christ.

1. Life
2. The Reign of Death
3. Death to Sin
4. Mortality and Corruption
5. Summary

1. Life.

Occasionally Paul clearly uses *zōē*, "life," and related forms to refer to present, earthly existence (Rom 5:10; 7:1-2, 9; 8:12-13; 1 Cor 3:22; 7:39; 15:19, 45; Phil 1:20, 22; 1 Thess 4:15, 17; 1 Tim 5:6; 2 Tim 4:1). *Bios*, "daily

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