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Questions

1. What is one way that Paul's letters used to be treated as the letters of Latin writers as Cicero and Seneca?
2. How do we read the epistles "historically?"
3. Why do scholars believe Paul would write a letter?
4. Why are the letters by Paul referred to as epistles?
5. What is a benefit of comparing the structures of Paul's letters to one another?

Answers

1. Paul's letters were thought to be read as intended published works of literature.
2. To read "historically" means that we have to take into account that the book was written by a particular individual(s) in a particular time in history and that it was motivated by some particular occasion.
3. The believe he wrote letters to meet specific historical needs. There was a concrete occasion that motivated him to write the letter. Like a specific church facing a specific problem that needed to be solved.
4. One reason is that they are more formal in character than you would expect from a typical personal correspondence.
5. This provides the means of comparing various letters with one another so that we can identify what is distinctive to each of them.

Terms

1. Epistles- composition of a letter that is found in the New Testament
2. Theological Interpretation- Exercise in discovering "contradictions" among the biblical authors, or the same author. Alternatively, it can mean finding a unifying theme throughout scripture.
3. Contextual Interpretation-Taking into account the historical context of the author, translator, and biblical narrative in order to come up with a interpretation for a passage of scripture.

Summary

Chapter 11 discusses how to best interpret and read through the Epistles. Different ways to do this are to read the New Testament letters as a whole, trying to contextualize the scriptures, looking at the literary point of view, and that we read them theologically. The chapter ends by saying that it's important to remember that the letters are authoritative writings and the historical character does not undermine their relevance.