



READING
THE NEW
TESTAMENT
TODAY

ROBERT E. VAN VOORST

Publisher: Holly J. Allen
Religion Editor: Steve Wainwright
Assistant Editors: Lee McCracken, Anna Lustig
Editorial Assistant: Barbara Hillaker
Marketing Manager: Worth Hawes
Marketing Assistant: Andrew Keay
Advertising Project Managers: Bryan Vann, Vicky Wan
Print/Media Buyer: Judy Inouye
Composition Buyer: Ben Schroeter

COPYRIGHT © 2005 Wadsworth, a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Thomson Learning™ is a trademark used herein under license.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution, information networks, or information storage and retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 08 07 06 05 04

For more information about our products, contact us at:
Thomson Learning Academic Resource Center
1-800-423-0563

For permission to use material from this text or product, submit a request online at
<http://www.thomsonrights.com>.

Any additional questions about permissions can be submitted by email to thomsonrights@thomson.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2004103437

ISBN 0-534-54180-1



Permissions Editor: Joohee Lee
Production Service: Matrix Productions
Photo Researcher: Sarah Evertson
Copy Editor: Vicki Nelson
Executive Art Director: Maria Epes
Cover Designer: Yvo Riezebos
Cover Image: W. Perry Conway / Corbis
Compositor: International Typesetting and Composition
Printer: Malloy Incorporated

Thomson Wadsworth

10 Davis Drive
Belmont, CA 94002-3098
USA

Asia

Thomson Learning
5 Shenton Way #01-01
UIC Building
Singapore 068808

Australia/New Zealand

Thomson Learning
102 Dodds Street
Southbank, Victoria 3006
Australia

Canada

Nelson
1120 Birchmount Road
Toronto, Ontario M1K 5G4
Canada

Europe/Middle East/Africa

Thomson Learning
High Holborn House
50/51 Bedford Row
London WC1R 4LR
United Kingdom

Latin America

Thomson Learning
Seneca, 53
Colonia Polanco
11560 Mexico D.F.
Mexico

Spain/Portugal

Paraninfo
Calle Magallanes, 25
28015 Madrid, Spain



Part IV

**Paul and the
Pauline Tradition**

Chapter Eleven

Introduction to Paul and the Pauline Tradition

Paul is second only to Jesus in his contribution to the development of Christianity. Formerly a staunch persecutor of the church, Paul had a dramatic confrontation with the risen Christ and became the greatest missionary the church has ever known. For nearly two decades, Paul traveled the eastern Mediterranean, spreading the good news about Jesus and founding small (by today's standards) but strategically located churches. To these churches he wrote letters that form an important part of the New Testament.

In this chapter we briefly introduce Paul and the Pauline letters as a framework for understanding Chapters 12–16. We begin by considering the sources that give us our knowledge of Paul in the NT. Next is a treatment of Paul as a letter writer and a brief discussion of the Pauline letter format. Third is “Seeking the Historical Paul.” This section reviews his life and includes a chronology. Fourth is a brief consideration of Paul's major teachings, followed by a discussion of the “new perspective” on the study of Paul. Finally, we treat the Pauline tradition and especially consider why some NT letters that bear Paul's name have been assigned to other, anonymous people after his death.

Our Sources for the Study of Paul

The reader of the NT knows Paul especially through his own authentic letters, through his disputed letters, and through the Acts of the Apostles. Second-century documents, such as the *Acts of Paul* and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, do not contribute a significant historical understanding of Paul, in the opinion of most NT scholars. Rather, they show us the way in which Paul and his message were understood in later times. From these three types of sources, Paul's own authentic letters are most significant because they are primary source material. Paul's disputed letters occasionally provide some information about the historical Paul and about how Paul was understood in the two generations after his death.



Follow the link to second-century writings about Paul.

A good deal of the material in Paul's letters is difficult to reconcile with Acts. Where discrepancies occur, scholars usually prefer Paul's firsthand version of events. The author of Acts seems unaware of Paul's correspondence with churches, his steadfast defense of his apostleship, and his distinctive teachings. Acts says comparatively little about Paul's essential gospel, only that people are saved by faith in Christ, not by obedience to Torah commands. The writer of Luke-Acts is concerned primarily with his own theological/historical purposes, and he fits Paul into that picture. Acts provides some biographical details that Paul never mentions in his letters: his birth in Tarsus; his Roman citizenship; his original name, Saul; his study under the leading Pharisee scholar Rabbi Gamaliel; and his supporting himself by tent making. These items of information from Acts do roughly fit our picture of Paul from his letters. With Acts' reliability in question here and Paul's autobiographical information so sparse, scholars are unable to reconstruct a full life of Paul. We do not know when he was born, how his family gained Roman citizenship, if he was once married, the precise course of his travels, where or when he wrote many of his letters, or the date and precise circumstances of his death. Nevertheless, Paul's letters that survive in the NT clearly show us his personality, missionary practice, and religious thought. We do not have a full picture of Paul, but what we have is clear enough.



Follow the link to an excellent overview of current Web resources for Paul.

Paul as a Letter Writer

In contrast to Jesus, who apparently wrote nothing, Paul wrote extensively. No fewer than thirteen NT letters have Paul's name on them, in total length nearly one-third of the NT. Many scholars regard only seven as genuinely Pauline, but the presence of other works attributed to him shows in what high esteem he was held. He so captured the imagination of later Christian writers that they paid tribute to Paul by writing in his name and perpetuating his teachings in his churches. In the NT canon, the thirteen letters that bear Paul's name are listed roughly according to their length. Letters to churches, such as Romans, appear first. Those addressed to individuals (in reality with a wider audience), such as Philemon, Timothy, and Titus, appear second. The letters to churches seemingly are ordered by length; then those to individuals likewise come in order of length. Because of this organization, the letters are not in any thematic, chronological, or geographic order.

Paul probably dictated his letters to a scribe or secretary, sometimes called an *amanuensis*, who could write quickly and well. Most people in the ancient Roman world would hire a scribe for such a purpose, but it is probable that one of Paul's co-workers acted in this role. Explicit mention of a scribe is found only

in Rom 16:21–22, where the name “Tertius” is found. In other places, the one dictating/authoring the letter took the pen personally and wrote final greetings without mentioning a scribe (Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; Philem 19; and 2 Thess 3:17; see also 1 Pet 5:12).

From what we can tell, one of Paul's co-workers delivered his letters personally: the Roman Empire had no public mail system. This co-worker would probably see to it that the letters were read aloud to the whole congregation, likely at its next Sunday service. He or she would be able to answer questions and concerns about the letter, shaping its first interpretation and application. Sometimes letters would be copied and shared with other churches, becoming **circular letters**. Thus, the first and main contact with Paul's letters for almost all his addressees would be a community and auditory experience. Moreover, they experienced the letter as a whole, which modern readers of NT letters should keep in mind.

Paul's Letter Format

Since we know of Paul primarily through his letters, and since his letters are written in a standard literary pattern, we should introduce the main lines of the letter format. This discussion applies to both the genuine and disputed letters.

The internal structure of the Greco-Roman letter must be kept in mind when we study the structure of NT letters. Like secular letters of the time, Paul's consist, with some variations, of the following parts in the following order.

Introduction

Like letters today, Paul's have a brief introduction. It consists of four items, always in the following order.

- **Sender:** Paul as the author of the letter puts his name first. Because ancient letters did not have an envelope and the author's name was usually not written on the outside of a rolled-up letter, it was wise to put the author's name first. Sometimes other people are listed in this section (for example, 1 Thess 1:1: “Paul, Silas and Timothy;”) but it is doubtful that they had a significant role in composing the letter.
- **Audience:** Paul then names the intended recipients of the letter, those to whom it is “addressed” (for example, 1 Thess 1:1: “to the church of the Thessalonians”). Because Paul meant all his letters to be read out loud to his intended recipients, they are literally his audience, and their reading is an act of oral performance.
- **Greeting:** Paul greets his audience briefly. In most NT letters, including all of Paul's, one finds the formula “grace and peace to you” (1 Thess 1:1). With this greeting, the author blesses the audience. It is a fuller and more religious greeting than the

usual Greco-Roman letter's generic expression, “greetings” (as we find in James 1:1). This blessing at the beginning of a letter is often called a **salutation**.

- **Thanksgiving:** The greeting is typically followed by a thanksgiving to God for the readers. The thanksgiving section is so called from its first words in most Pauline letters, “I give thanks.” It sometimes concludes with a prayer on behalf of the intended reader. It is a short paragraph in length. Often Paul hints gently and positively about the more difficult themes to come in the body of the letter, thus making his first rhetorical move. Secular letters of the time have a short wish for health or a short prayer in this section.

Body of the Letter

Following the introduction, the author would deal with the matter for which he is writing. Of course, this is by far the longest part of the letter, varying from less than one page (Philemon) to many pages (Romans, 1 Corinthians). The form the letter body takes depends on how Paul is writing but often includes two main sections. Usually they are in this order; sometimes they are intermixed:

- Teaching on religious ideas, issues, and problems. This teaching was meant to instruct and persuade its audience. Sometimes it replies to issues the audience has written to Paul about, but more often it deals with matters that have come to Paul's attention through other means such as visits by members of his congregations and news from his co-workers.
- **Parenesis**, or moral exhortation urging the audience to live in a manner pleasing to God. This part often begins with a direct appeal such as, “I beseech/urge/exhort/ask you.” The main parenesis is usually in developed form, with treatment of various themes such as sexual morality, mutual love among believers, or moral duties to the outside world. At the end of this section, Paul likes to pile up short, even staccato commands.

Conclusion

This is often the shortest of the three sections, in both Pauline and secular letters of the time. The conclusion section has more variety in its internal structure and contents than the other sections but most often comes in this order:

- The conclusion echoes and reinforces major concerns of the body of the letter. At times this is obvious (Gal 6, 1 Thess 5), at other times subtle.
- The author may send his own greetings. Because Paul used a secretary, this part of the letter closing would often be in his own hand for a more personal touch (Gal 6:11). This resembles our practice today of penning a note at the end of a computer-printed letter to make it more personal.
- The author conveys greetings from people known to both him and the reader(s), if applicable.
- In Pauline letters one usually finds a **benediction** (blessing from God upon the audience) at the end. In secular letters, one finds the simple word “farewell.”

Developing Your Skills: Identifying Parts of the Letter

1. Here is an example of a **private** letter from the second or third century (Oxyrhynchus Papyri CXVII). Identify its main **parts**:

Chaerus to his brother Dionysius, greetings. I have already urged you in person to have the horoscope in the archives prepared, to prepare for the sale of the slaves' children, and to sell the wine that comes from both the near and the far vineyard, keeping the money in a safe place until I come. I send you some good melon seeds through Diogenes the friend of Chaereas the citizen, and **two** strips of cloth sealed with my seal, one of which please give to your children. Greet your sister and Cyrilla. Rhodope and Arsinoüs greet you. I pray that you would fare well.

2. Next, name the different parts of Paul's letter to Philemon (Paul's shortest).



Follow the link on the website for more on the NT letter structure.

Seeking the Historical Paul

As a missionary for his new faith, Paul never forgets his Jewishness. Although he fights to free Gentile believers in Jesus from Torah observance, Paul consistently stresses the continuity between Judaism and what we call "Christianity." (Paul never uses this term, and perhaps it would have puzzled him.) For him, the new religious movement is revealed through Jesus' ministry but shaped and largely defined by the Hebrew Bible. It carries on the best features of Second Temple Judaism. Throughout his letters, Paul quotes selected parts of the Hebrew Scripture to add strength to his message. Despite Paul's strong belief that observance of the Mosaic Torah is not necessary for Gentile believers in Jesus, much of the Hebrew biblical tradition retains its teaching authority for him.

Paul's letters repeatedly stress his Jewish heritage. He describes himself as a circumcised Jew from the Israelite tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3:5–6). He states that he outdid his Jewish contemporaries in strict observance of "the traditions of [his] ancestors" (Gal 1:13–14). A member of the Pharisee sect, he obeyed the Torah completely. "In legal rectitude"—keeping the Torah commandments—Paul judges himself "faultless" (Phil 3:6). What is more, Paul still saw himself after his conversion as a Jewish rabbi, only one who now proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah not just of the Jews, but of the Gentiles as well.

Paul's life falls into two completely different parts. In the first part, he was a devout Pharisee who zealously persecuted the first Christians, even to the point of their death. Paul rarely wrote about this, perhaps because he remained deeply sorry

for it ("I am the least of all the saints, because I persecuted the church of God." 1 Cor 15:9). The little that we know of this period comes from Acts 8–9 and so must be used with some caution. In the second part of Paul's life, he was a Christian missionary who successfully founded new churches in key Gentile cities in the western Mediterranean and perhaps was the first to found churches on the European continent. The event that so radically transformed Paul from persecuting Christians to resolutely promoting Christianity was nothing less than "a revelation of Jesus Christ" to him (Gal 1:12). Acts depicts this revelation as a vision of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, which both "converted" Paul and called him to his apostolic task. (Contemporary scholarship most commonly refers to this event as a "call.") "God set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, and was pleased to reveal his Son to me so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles" (Gal 1:15–16). This event probably occurred around 36 C.E., to follow traditional dating. The author of Acts emphasizes the importance of this event by narrating it completely three times (Acts 9, 22 and 26), repetition rare in a narrative. Paul alludes to his experience much more briefly but with just as much meaning, speaking simply of being called by God's grace (Gal 1:15), of having an "abnormal birth" into the faith, and of witnessing an appearance of the risen Jesus (1 Cor 15:8–9).

After a time of preparation that may have lasted for several years, which probably involved a good deal of rethinking his life and beliefs, Paul began his missionary travels. The traditional method of dating Paul's chronology places this around 40 C.E. Paul had a great deal of physical vigor to pursue his constant travels and endure many physical hardships (which he catalogues in 2 Cor 11:24–27). He carried on despite the mysterious "thorn in the flesh" that often hindered him (2 Cor 12:7). Paul's physical strength was exceeded only by the strength of his mind and emotions. His letters reveal a person of great intellect, who can structure an intricate, persuasive argument. Paul also has a good deal of emotional intensity. He expresses, and leads his readers to share, great joy (Philippians) and great sorrow (2 Corinthians). He expresses profound affection and gentle tact toward his audience (1 Thess 1–3; 1 Cor 13; Phil 1:3–9; 2:1–4; 4:2–3). He uses these emotions in a careful way, to persuade his readers to think like him and do what he says. On the other hand, it must have been a withering experience for his churches to be on the receiving end of his negative emotions. In one letter, he calls his own people "stupid" and "bewitched" (Gal 3:1). In the same letter, he urges those who are persuading his Gentile Christians to be circumcised—his opponents who were likely there as the letter was read!—to castrate themselves (Gal 5:12). In another letter, he counters criticism of his conduct with wild boasting, wounded anger, and biting sarcasm, all for careful persuasive effect on the reader (2 Cor 10–13). Even within letters Paul can quickly switch his emotional tone. As he writes one letter to a church he did not himself found, in Rome, Paul is respectful and emotionally restrained. Some modern readers value a more restrained expression of emotions and may look negatively upon Paul for "wearing his heart on his sleeve." Here we must recall here that in Mediterranean cultures, including ancient Jewish culture, fuller expression of one's emotions is the norm.

Table 11.1 Pauline Chronology

Traditional Dating	Event	Revisionist Dating
34–36 C.E.	Conversion to Christ/call to be an Apostle on the road to Damascus, Syria	30–34 C.E.
36–39	Travels to “Arabia” (Nabatea), return to Damascus and preaching there	31–33
39	Visit to Jerusalem to meet Peter and James	33/37
40–44	(First) missionary journey, preaching to Gentiles in Syria and Cilicia; return to Antioch	After 37
49	Jerusalem “conference” on admitting Gentiles into the church without circumcision	47/51
50–52	(Second) missionary journey, beginning in Antioch, through southern Asia Minor to Galatia, Macedonia, Athens, and Corinth (1 Thessalonians written); return to Jerusalem and Antioch	48–55
54–58	(Third) Missionary Journey, beginning from Antioch through N. Galatia to Ephesus. Paul stays in Ephesus for three years, possibly imprisoned for some time (Galatians [?] Philippians [?], Philemon, 1 Corinthians written)	Indistinct from second journey (48/55)
	Paul returns to Macedonia and Corinth (2 Corinthians, Galatians [?] written). He winters at Corinth (Romans written), and returns to Jerusalem	(After 54)
58–61	Arrested in Jerusalem; imprisoned two years in Caesarea (Philippians?). Finally sent to Rome under armed guard in a long sea journey	52–55 or 56–58
61–63	Prisoner in Rome for two years (Philippians [?] Philemon [?] written)	61–61
After summer 64	Death in Rome in Neronian persecution after the Great Fire	64

Pauline Chronology

One of the most difficult aspects of studying Paul's career and message is its **chronology**, ordering sequentially and dating it. Having a basic grasp of chronology is important not only for historical understanding, but also for grasping the possible



The Roman Forum Excavations began at the end of the eighteenth century and continue through today. Most of the buildings were dismantled after antiquity and used in churches and private residences, but the glory of Rome can still be seen and felt here. The Arch of Septimius Severus is on the left, the Arch of Titus is at the center rear. On the upper right is the Palatine Hill, where the emperors had their palaces. Rome is Paul's destination in Acts, and his most influential letter was written to Rome. Used by permission of BiblePlaces.com.

development of Paul's thought. For centuries, Pauline chronology was understood by way of Acts and discrepancies were somehow made to fit its picture. Within the last generation especially, some NT scholars have taken their chronology from Paul's undisputed letters themselves. The results of these two methods are laid out in Table 11.1, adapted from Raymond Brown (Brown 1997, 428). Most dates are approximate.

References in the NT to three historical figures or events help to determine key dates in Paul's life and give some external framework for his chronology. The first figure is a mention in 2 Cor 11:32–33 of King Aretas IV, the ruler of the Arab kingdom of Nabatea (southeast of Palestine). Paul says that an agent of Aretas forced him to flee Damascus, in the Roman province of Syria. Since Aretas ruled between 9 and 39 C.E., we can conclude that Paul was involved in his missionary

work during the decade of the 30s. The second historical reference is in Acts 18:11, where Gallio is the Roman governor of Greece while Paul visits Corinth. Gallio was governor of Greece only between 51 and 53 C.E. Since Paul had been in Corinth about eighteen months before he was brought up on charges before Gallio, Paul probably arrived in Corinth about 50 C.E. Third, Acts tells us that when Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome, the Jewish-Christian husband-and-wife missionary team of Aquila and Priscilla had recently arrived in Corinth from Rome and met Paul (Acts 18:1–2). Since the expulsion took place in 49 C.E., it furnishes evidence that Paul arrived in Corinth about 50. This external evidence, when joined to internal evidence, enables us to be relatively sure about the main timeline of Paul's life.

[www](#) Follow the link for a succinct presentation of Pauline chronology.

Paul's Major Teachings: A Very Brief Introduction

Paul's thinking and ways of expressing himself are often complex, making it difficult for scholars today to achieve a consensus about the apostle's views. Paul's letters were also challenging for the people in his churches, and one later NT writer said explicitly about them, "There are some things in them that are hard to understand" (2 Pet 3:16). Paul's conviction that Jesus had revealed himself to Paul and given him the foundations of "his gospel" means that Paul's teaching is grounded in an intensely personal experience. Moreover, because his presentation of theological issues is secondary to his missionary-pastor task, letters do not represent a complete or systematic statement of Pauline belief. They are **occasional writings**, that is, letters addressed to a specific situation and occasion. Therefore, what we have in Paul's letters is not strictly a theology in a sense of a systematic, comprehensive treatment, and a theology cannot fully be extracted from them. In addition, readers will find Paul's thoughts changing and developing from one letter to another. Nevertheless, in studying Paul's undisputed letters, it helps to keep in mind several of his basic beliefs about Christ, the Spirit of God, and the life of the believer.

Paul's Jewish theological heritage is central to his "Christian" belief. There is only one God. This one God is the creator of the cosmos, the redeemer of God's people, and the one who guides human history to its conclusion. This God chose Israel as his own people, and through Israel would bless all the nations of the earth. In the Pharisee side of his Jewish heritage (especially the apocalyptic portions of the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish literature) Paul also saw glimmers of the future. Although evil is strong, God will triumph over it at the end of time. God will send a Messiah, a promised deliverer; God will come to establish God's rule, judge all peoples according to their deeds, and give eternal life to the righteous.

The Centrality of Jesus Christ

Central to Paul's belief is his firm conviction that God saves the world in Jesus Christ. Jesus is not just the Messiah of the Jews, but he is Christ the Lord of all peoples. Indeed, Paul regularly refers to "the Lord Jesus Christ." Although Paul's letters show little concern for Jesus' earthly ministry or teaching (referring to it less than ten times), his belief does center on the death, resurrection, heavenly reign, and coming of Jesus. Therefore, Paul's Christology has a past, present, and future aspect. The past aspect focuses on the death and resurrection of Jesus; although Paul most probably knows of Jesus' preexistence as the divine Son before his earthly life, he does not develop this narrative or make it an important part of his thought (Phil 2:6–11). The present aspect focuses on the heavenly Christ in two main roles: the divine Lord by whom God rules all things (Phil 2:11; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 15:24–28) and the means by whom God's Spirit dwells in believers (Rom 8). As for the future aspect of Paul's Christology, all of Paul's undisputed letters, from 1 Thessalonians to Romans, express a strong orientation toward the coming of Jesus in glory at the end of time, when through the work of Christ "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). People enter into the saving life of Christ by faith in him, a faith created by God in them by God's Spirit.

Paul's regular confession of Jesus Christ as "Lord" is rich in meaning. In its Hebrew Bible background, it identifies Jesus Christ as the God of Israel. But Paul uses the title "Lord" for Jesus as God's Son, while making clear that Jesus is in some way subordinated to God (1 Cor 11:3; 15:28). In its Roman-Hellenistic background, so important for most of Paul's readers, "Lord" was a title of respect for the gods and goddesses. It was used for rulers like Augustus and the other emperors, especially when they were deified after their deaths. It also expressed honor to anyone in a higher social position in everyday society. Paul followed earlier church tradition when he called Jesus "Lord," and he used the title especially to denote Jesus as the conqueror of death and evil. Paul contrasts Christ with the symbol of earthly humanity, Adam: God's first human creation in the Hebrew Bible book of Genesis, and a person symbolic of all humans. Before Jesus' coming, humans lived only in Adam's perishable image, victims of sin and death (Rom 5:12–21). Despite the notable goodness and accomplishments of both Gentiles and Jews, their lives were distorted and ultimately destroyed by evil. By contrast, believers are now "in Christ," living with him and by his power. They belong to him, and his life has become theirs by means of God's Spirit living in them. At the end of time, they will also share in the glorified Christ's eternal life (1 Cor 15:21–24, 45–49).

Christ as Savior from the Power of Sin and Death

Paul believes that all human beings, Gentiles and Jews, are under the domination of sin and thus are alienated from God (Rom 1–3, 7). Paul views sin not just as individual and social wrongdoing, but also as a cosmic force that oppresses humans.

Sin's consequence for humans is death, a human condition we share with Adam (Rom 5:12–21). Christ's faithfulness to his Father and his death on the cross, in which he self-sacrificially took upon himself the penalty for sin, liberates those who trust in him. His death gives them life. It frees them from the power of sin, from death, and from the Torah's curses upon sinners (Gal 3–5, Rom 3–7). For Paul, "freedom in Christ" means deliverance from the "present evil age" of sin and punishment, including the Torah's power to condemn, and brings the believer into the "coming age" of God's perfect life (Gal 1:3–4). This freedom from sin leads to freedom for responsible, creative love. Jesus' sacrificial death, resurrection, and present reign have totally changed humans' relationship to God and have brought faith, life and hope to the world. Christ is the definitive and only means of destroying the powers of sin and death and making things right. Because Christ has now reconciled humanity to God, and is the only Lord, other supernatural beings such as angels or the spirits of the stars cannot rescue humanity.

Christ as the Center of Eschatology

This salvation in Christ is seen in an eschatological framework. Like many first-century adherents to the Jewish **apocalyptic** worldview, Paul sees human history as separated into two ages of different qualities. The **present evil age** is even now being replaced by a **new age/age to come**, a new creation characterized by perfect life. Paul believes that God will soon bring this new age in its fullness (Gal 1:3–4; 1 Cor 15:20–28; 2 Cor 5:17). Paul does not often use the phrase "kingdom/rule of God," but his thoughts on the new age closely parallel this leading teaching of Jesus. The old age is characterized by disobedience to God, faithlessness, death, and the oppressive rule of the Law of Moses. The new age is characterized by the dualistic opposites of these: obedience, faith, eternal life, and free life in the Spirit. Because the Messiah has arrived, died, and risen from the dead, Paul believes that the new age is present in significant part, and will come in its fullness when Jesus returns. In Christ, the two ages overlap in the present time. This overlap distinguishes Paul's apocalyptic thought from other apocalyptic of the day, Jewish and Christian. Paul's letters thus burn with special moral urgency, because he believes that the present time marks the crucial transition period between the two ages. This apocalyptic theology can be charted as follows:

Table 11.2 Paul's Apocalyptic Theology

The Present Evil Age	The Age to Come
Sin	Obedience
Flesh	Holy Spirit
Death	Eternal Life
Law	Grace
Slavery	Freedom
Life in Adam	Life in Christ

Paul's conviction that the Messiah's appearance has inaugurated the end of time permeates his teaching on morality. Paul's instruction on marriage, divorce, slavery, celibacy, and human behavior in general is shaped to some extent by his expectation of the impending end of the world. In his oldest surviving letter, he states that he expects to witness the **Parousia**, the return of Jesus Christ in glory: "We who are left alive until the Lord comes . . . [will be] caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:15–17). In 1 Corinthians, his expectation to live until the End is equally certain; hence, he advises his people that "the time we live in will not last long" (1 Cor 7:29). He also writes, "We shall not all die, but we shall all be changed . . . For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise undying, and we [the living] shall be changed" (1 Cor 15:51–52). This imminent expectation leads at times to an **interim ethic**, moral guidance for Christians in the short time that the world has left but perhaps not applicable if the end is not near. For example, in 1 Corinthians he counsels Christians not to marry or remarry, because the end of time is near. In 1 Thessalonians he tells his church to keep busy and not to idle away the time because the end is near.

www Follow the link to an excellent essay by Dr. Judith Stevens, "Paul and the New Creation."

Union with Christ

Paul's gospel and the life of his churches are not only a matter of what Jesus as Savior did, is doing, and will do at the end of time. Just as important for Paul's thought—found in all his letters—is a present spiritual relationship established by Christ and sustained by the Spirit between believers and God. Paul regularly addresses his letters to those "in Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:2; Phil 1:1, 1 Thess 1:1, and the rest). They were "baptized into Christ" and had "put on Christ" (Gal 3:26–28). In their baptism, they also "died with Christ" (Rom 6:1–14). Paul bases his authority as an apostle, and the validity of his distinctive gospel to the Gentiles, on his experience of a dramatic revelation of the resurrected Jesus (Gal 1:11–12, 15–17; 1 Cor 15:8–9). This experience tells him that Jesus Christ now exists as Lord in two interrelated ways, cosmic and personal. He is Lord of the cosmic spiritual domain, because Paul's revelation of Jesus came from heaven. He is Lord of the individual life of the believer, because the heavenly Jesus spoke to him as an individual to end his rebellion and call him to be an apostle. Christ is both the divine Son of God who will come from heaven with overwhelming power to recreate the world and a divine Son who lives within his earthly communities and in each individual believer through the Holy Spirit.

Paul's **mysticism**, union with an unseen spiritual person, is an important part of his thought. Paul's belief is similar to other religious systems of the time that promised living connection to the divine, especially the mystery religions. However, it is always connected with his Jewish eschatology, which in turn is grounded in the death and resurrection of the historical Jesus. Paul had recurring spiritual experiences

that no doubt encouraged him in his apostolic career, but his ministry and theology did not depend on them. For example, Paul tells the Corinthians that he speaks to God in heavenly, spiritual tongues more than all of them but does so only privately, because speaking in tongues does not build others up in faith as much as plain speech does (1 Cor 14:1–19). To take another example, Paul says that he was “caught up as far as the third heaven, into paradise,” where he “heard words that humans may not repeat”; he does not reveal these words but ministers only out of the weakness of the death of Christ (2 Cor 12:14–19). He adds that, to prevent him from becoming overconfident from such revelations, God gave him a chronic “sharp physical pain” to teach him that his apostolic abilities came from God, not from himself (2 Cor 12:7–8).

Believers Together in the Church, the Body of Christ

To judge from his letters, Paul was a strong individual, and he centered his life and thought on another individual, Jesus Christ. However, this must not allow us to conclude that he saw the Christian faith as something basically for individuals. Rather, in line with his Jewish heritage and the social ethos of the Mediterranean world, human life for Paul was first and foremost a social, group matter. For example, Paul's sense of union with Christ is expressed in the metaphor of the church as the “body of Christ.” Using this image to identify the believing community as the earthly expression of Christ, Paul states that the faithful collectively are Christ's “body,” of which he is the “head” (1 Cor 10:16–18; 12:12–30; Rom 12). The church lives and functions in union with Christ so fully that it reveals him to the world. Paul always stresses that within this whole body each believer is like a part of the human body, with her or his own individual function and gifts to be employed for the good of the whole. Individuality is acknowledged, and its strengths are encouraged, but only as a part of the whole earthly body as guided by its heavenly head, Christ himself. To put it another way, we find in Paul's letters *individuality* but not *individualism*.

Justification by Faith

How can a holy, righteous God “justify” (save by welcoming them as God's own people at the end of time) human beings whose unrighteous behavior makes them enemies of God? This question was no doubt raised in Paul's mind by his conversion/call on the road to Damascus. Paul experienced divine mercy, expressed through an unexpected revelation of Jesus to him, even as he was killing those who believed in Jesus. This experience convinced him that Christ had “justified” or “made him right” before God. This conviction became the basis of his ministry to the Gentiles: Paul believed that if God could save him, God could save anyone! This teaching of **justification by faith**, that faith in Christ delivers one from sin, and that (in retrospect) obedience to the Mosaic Law cannot, placed Paul at odds with most of Judaism. It characteristically

held that obedience to the Law is essential to enter and stay in a relationship with God. Just as important for Paul's ministry, this teaching also put him at odds with many Jewish Christians of the first century C.E. For them, to accept Jesus as Israel's Messiah (Christ) was to observe the Jewish law just as Jesus had done. Some of these Jewish Christians visited Paul's churches to persuade these Gentile believers to be circumcised and keep at least some important Torah obligations. Paul argues strongly against them in letters like Galatians, 2 Corinthians, and Philippians. For observant Jews, the Law provides a valid means of maintaining a right relationship with the Deity. The Torah is clear and is clearly able to be kept, and the gift of the covenant empowered the Jewish people to follow God's law in a positive, joyful way.

Paul's encounter with Jesus gave him a new perspective. Although Paul claims that he kept God's law fully and well (Phil 3:6), after his encounter with the risen Jesus he knew that the Mosaic Covenant was no longer the means by which God restored humans to himself. Christ has created a different way to belong to God: by his sacrificial death, Jesus paid the Law's penalty for all human sin, thereby ending Law keeping as a path to God. Through belief in Christ, which God creates by the work of the Spirit, believers are incorporated into Jesus' self-sacrifice (they “die with Christ”), are brought back into God's family, and receive eternal life. God's **grace** (God's undeserved mercy and love) brings salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike. All this enables us to understand Paul's insistence on the equal inclusion of the Gentiles, and his career-long efforts to bring the Gentile world into the heritage of Judaism.

www

Follow the link to the recent Lutheran-Catholic joint statement on justification, which deals extensively with Paul's theology and its meaning for Christian churches today.

The New Perspective on Paul

This discussion of justification by faith in Paul leads us to an important issue in contemporary NT scholarship. The publication in 1977 of E. P. Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* marked a turning point in Pauline interpretation. Sanders sharply attacked the portrayal of Judaism as a religion of “works righteousness” that generations of Christians had mistakenly derived from Paul, referring to the portrayal as a caricature. That caricature stemmed largely from the sixteenth-century Protestant reformer Martin Luther. Luther identified the personal battle in which he saw himself engaged with what he believed to be Paul's struggle in the mid-first century. Both, he thought, were confronting a religion of “works righteousness,” earning one's own salvation by faithful deeds, exemplified in the one case by certain tendencies of late medieval Catholicism and in the other by Judaism. Luther's ideas of justification continued into the modern world by mainstream Protestants and evangelical Christians alike. Though Sanders had predecessors who tried to promote the same message, none managed to bring about the turn around that he achieved.

Three full post-Holocaust decades seemingly had to elapse for a total reconsideration of the way Judaism was portrayed in Christian scriptural interpretation. We now have, in the phrase coined by James D. G. Dunn, a **new perspective on Paul**.

Within that new perspective, as it has evolved over the years, there is considerable variety. The moderate view of the British NT scholar James Dunn has won wide acceptance (Dunn 1999). Dunn has helpfully explained the difference of the new perspective as being a matter of “staying in” the people of God, not primarily of “getting in.” Within this variety of viewpoints, however, it is possible to list certain common characteristics of the new perspective.

- The new perspective stresses the continuities between Paul and Judaism, seeing him within the broad range of Second Temple Judaism rather than as a “convert” from it to a completely different religion. Paul is more “Jewish” than “Christian,” as those terms are used of people today.
- It emphasizes the occasional nature of Paul’s letters, including the letter to Rome. The letters explain the terms upon which Gentile converts should be admitted to the community of faith and allowed a full share in its life along with believers of Jewish background.
- A strong current has flowed into the new perspective on Paul from social scientific study of the early Christian communities. Christian teaching of salvation is seen more as a matter of “belonging” than of “getting in.”
- Gentile Christians are the primary addressees of Paul’s letters. When Paul addresses Jewish issues, especially those of the Torah, he does so for the benefit of Gentiles and with their concerns chiefly in mind. Any anti-Jewish sounding polemic principally targets Jewish-Christian missionaries who would seek to impose upon Gentile converts practices that were never intended for them. Therefore, Paul’s attack on law observance in Gentile churches is a matter of inner Jewish argument, not an attack on a completely different religion.
- The failure of Israel does not consist so much in being bound up with the sinful state of humankind, though this is not denied. More so, the fault lies in Israel’s ethnic pride and exclusivism, which fails to recognize God’s grace to Gentiles as the fulfillment of the covenant promises to Abraham.

www

Follow the link to an online presentation of the new perspective on Paul.

The Pauline Tradition

The analysis of Paul offered here is based on his seven generally accepted works: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. These letters are *generally accepted* by NT scholars as authentic, and are often thus referred to as the **undisputed Pauline letters**. The six other books with Paul’s name on them are **disputed Pauline letters**; that is, either the majority of scholars reject their authenticity or there is a good deal of debate about them. Two cautions must

be sounded here. First, some leading scholars conclude that works like the Pastorals, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians are genuine Pauline letters. Second, by using terms like “disputed” and “undisputed” most NT scholars do not mean to imply that the truth about whether or not Paul wrote these letters is determined by majority vote. The labels are merely a shorthand way to indicate where most scholarship lies on the question.

Although Paul probably did not write these letters, his influence can be seen in many passages that contain Pauline concepts. Such passages are now combined with other material that seemed to be appropriate for the conditions that existed in the churches at the time the letters were written. The **Deutero-Pauline letters** or epistles are Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus; the latter three letters are also known as the Pastoral Epistles because they deal with leading the church. (The Latin word *pastor* means “shepherd,” a common biblical image of leadership.) Although we will discuss matters of authorship in subsequent chapters, we should indicate briefly here why most scholars conclude that these are later works in the Pauline tradition.

Colossians and Ephesians

The literary style of Colossians and Ephesians is significantly different from that of Paul’s undisputed letters. Most scholars conclude that the difference is much greater than can be accounted for by Paul’s old age, imprisonment, use of a liturgical or hymnic style, or giving to his secretary a wider freedom to compose the exact wording of his general ideas. In Colossians and especially Ephesians, for example, the sentences are long and complex; Ephesians 1:3–14 is one sentence in Greek, which English translations obscure by breaking into smaller sentences. Paul’s usual style in his undisputed letters is to write more conversationally; his sentences there are shorter and livelier.

In matters of content, certain key words in Colossians and Ephesians are not found in Paul’s authentic letters but are found frequently in the later New Testament writings and writings of the Church Fathers. Examples from Ephesians include: “commonwealth of God” (2:11); “likeness of God” (4:24), and “debauchery” (5:18). Also, the author of Ephesians used a different term or phrase in place of the one that would be expected from the unquestioned letters. For example, the writer often used “heavenly places” (Eph 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12), but Paul generally refers to “heaven” (Rom 1:18; Gal 1:18; Phil 3:20). Also, the household code (Eph 5:21–6:9; Col 3:18–4:1) is not found in the unquestioned letters.

Some distinctive aspects of Colossians are a factor in questioning its authorship:

- Concern for the authority of Paul’s unique position, which goes beyond Paul’s regular defense of his apostleship (1:24–25)
- Stress on knowledge, wisdom, and correct teaching (1:9–10)

- Absence of central Pauline concepts such as the Holy Spirit, the law, and justification by faith
- The notion that believers have already been raised with Christ, which Paul denies in 1 Cor 15:2, 13.

In Ephesians we note the following main differences with Paul's undisputed letters:

- Disappearance of the expected imminent end of the world
- A household code more socially conservative than Colossian's (5:22–33) and much more conservative than social ethics in the undisputed letters
- Rising appreciation of the apostles (2:20; 3:5)
- Believers already share not only Christ's death, but his resurrection and even his ascension (2:5–6)
- The obvious use of Colossians as a source by the writer of Ephesians. By contrast, Paul's letters are always freshly written, even when he is talking on the same topic.

2 Thessalonians

Like Colossians and Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians is written in a style and content different from Paul's own. If we compare 2 Thessalonians to 1 Thessalonians, which was surely written by Paul, these differences are apparent:

- 2 Thessalonians is impersonal in comparison with the earlier letter to this church. No details of Paul's relationships with the Thessalonian Christians or his past and future travel plans are mentioned.
- 1 Thessalonians speaks of the salvation of Christians when Christ comes in judgment (1:10, 4:17–18); 2 Thessalonians is more concerned with the punishment that will come upon nonbelievers (1:6–9, 2:8–12).
- As much as a third of 2 Thessalonians consists of sentences and phrases from 1 Thessalonians. As we saw earlier, Paul does not recycle his earlier writings.
- Some terms and words that Paul used in his authentic letters occur in 2 Thessalonians with a very different meaning. To take one example, "standing firm" means standing firm "in the Lord" in 1 Thess 3:8, but in 2 Thess 2:15 it means holding on to the traditions that have been taught in the word and in the letters of the apostle.

The Pastoral Epistles

The Pastoral Epistles (1–2 Timothy and Titus) were probably written between 90 and 110 C.E. They are valuable from a historical perspective, since they reveal the beginnings of a type of church organization that, with modifications, has persisted to the present. They also testify to a struggle with Gnosticism that was to intensify in the second century. The Pastoral Epistles are different at key points with Paul's undisputed letters:

- Faith is not so much a personal commitment as it is a body of propositions to be believed (1 Tim 1:19). The value of good works is stressed (1 Tim 2:10; 5:10;

- 6:8; 2 Tim 2:21; Titus 2:14). Justification is the outcome of both faith and works (Titus 3:5–6).
- "Savior" is a title used for God as well as for Christ (1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4).
- The Pastorals lack or undervalue key Pauline concepts. For example, the phrase "in Christ" is not used, and the indwelling Spirit occurs in only two places: 2 Tim 1:14 and Titus 3:5.
- In vocabulary and style, 360 words contained in the Pastorals do not appear in the authentic letters, a much higher proportion of unique words than in any of the commonly accepted letters.

For these reasons, most NT researchers today do not consider the Pastorals to be genuine Pauline letters.

The Problem of Pseudonymity

The author of 2 Thessalonians tells his readers not to become overly excited if they receive a letter falsely bearing Paul's name, indicating that the practice of circulating forged documents purportedly by apostolic writers had already begun (2 Thess 2:1–3). To some modern readers, the notion that unknown Christians wrote in Paul's name is ethically unacceptable because such "forgeries" could not be part of the New Testament. In the ancient world, however, twenty-first-century ideas about authorship would have been irrelevant, for it was then common for disciples of great thinkers to compose works perpetuating their masters' thoughts. They wrote about contemporary issues as they believed their leader would have if he were still alive. However, there is some debate on whether early Christians appreciated these "blessed deceptions" (Achtemeier 1996).

This practice of creating new works under the identity of a well-known but deceased personage is called **pseudonymity**. Intending to honor an esteemed figure of the past rather than necessarily to deceive the reading public, both Jews and early Christians produced a large body of pseudonymous literature. In an attempt to apply the teachings of a dead prophet or spiritual mentor to current situations, Jewish authors wrote books ascribed to such revered biblical figures as Daniel, Enoch, Noah, David, Isaiah, Ezra, and Moses. Some, such as the book of Daniel, were accepted into the Hebrew Bible canon; others, such as 1 Enoch (quoted as scripture in the New Testament letter of Jude), were not. Still others, including the apocalyptic 2 Esdras, became part of the Apocrypha. The precise motives inspiring pseudonymous Christian writers are unknown, but some may have wished to obtain a respectful hearing for their views that only a work purportedly by Paul, Peter, or another authority in the early church could command. During the first three centuries C.E., numerous works, including Gospels, apostolic Acts, letters, and apocalypses, became associated with the names of Peter, John, James, Barnabas, and Paul. One, the letter to the Hebrews, was anonymous originally and stayed anonymous because no one tried to attach a name to it.

Some of these anonymous and pseudonymous books conveyed a message persuasive enough to gain a place in the Pauline tradition, and then in the New Testament. In other words, they were viewed as *apostolic* in content. In the last chapter of this book, we will examine the process of how and why certain documents entered the canon and others did not.

Key Terms and Concepts

amanuensis • apocalyptic structure of Paul's thought • benediction (section of letter) chronology of Paul (traditional and revisionist) • circular letters • Deutero-Pauline letters disputed/pseudonymous Pauline letters • grace • interim ethic • justification by faith mysticism • new age/age to come • new perspective on Paul • occasional writings parenesis • Parousia • present evil age • pseudonymity • salutation thanksgiving (section of letter) • undisputed/authentic Pauline letters

Questions for Study, Discussion, and Writing

1. One often hears the comment, "Paul was the real founder of Christianity, not Jesus." To what degree is this statement accurate, to what not?
2. Compare the genre of personal letters today—"snail mail" and e-mail—with Paul's letters. What are the similarities and differences, and why?
3. Give your own explanation for why Paul changed his name from Saul to Paul. Note carefully how his name shifts in Acts 13:9, and consider why in his letters he always calls himself "Paul."
4. We read these letters silently and individually today, but what would be some of the dynamics of reading these letters out loud to the whole congregation? For example, how does Paul's advice to or about particular people (e.g., Phil 4:2–3; 1 Cor 5:1–5) change when it is read out loud to the whole congregation?
5. It is sometimes said that Acts does not portray the importance to Paul of his conversion/call by the risen Jesus. In light of the three times in Acts where this event is narrated, how accurate is this idea?
6. Explain in your own words Table 11.2 on the structure of Paul's apocalyptic eschatology. Explain also the overlap in apocalyptic that Paul features.
7. What are your own thoughts on the issue of pseudonymity in the Bible? Do you regard it as a problem? Why, or why not?

Further Reading

- Cousar, Charles B. *The Letters of Paul*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996. Places the letters in their historical and theological context.
- Dunn, James D. *Theology of Paul the Apostle*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999. An excellent overview of Pauline theology, using Romans as an organizational pattern.
- Horrell, David G. *An Introduction to the Study of Paul*. New York: Continuum, 2001. Introduces students to the differing methods and positions of contemporary scholars in Pauline studies, especially social scientific and feminist approaches.

- Jewett, Robert. *A Chronology of Paul's Life*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979. Evaluates earlier systems of dating events in Paul's career and provides a new, revisionist chronology.
- Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *Paul. A Critical Life*. New York: Clarendon, 1996. Explores psychological motivations for Paul's persecution of Christians, his Pharisaic background, and his missionary tours.
- Neyrey, Jerome H. *Paul, in Other Words: A Cultural Reading of His Letters*. Louisville, KY: Westminster Press/John Knox Press, 1990. An analysis of Paul's writings to discover the underlying cultural and social assumptions on which Paul bases his worldview and theology.
- Roetzel, Calvin. *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*, 3rd ed. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1991. Provides excellent introductions to each Pauline letter.
- Sanders, E. P. *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983. An exploration of Paul's Jewish heritage by a leading expert.
- Segal, Alan. *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990. Examines Paul's views of the Christ event in the light of his Jewish heritage.