

Interpreting the Pauline Epistles¹

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Introduction

The Pauline letters have played a decisive role in the formation of Christian theology over the centuries. Paul's influence was primary in the **theologies of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Barth**. The theological impact of Paul may blind us to the most striking feature of his writings. He never wrote a systematic theology in which all the elements of his thought are related together and presented in a coherent and logical fashion. **Instead he wrote letters to churches (or individuals), and these letters were addressed to the particular circumstances faced by the churches.** The Pauline letters are not theological treatises in which a full-fledged theological system is elaborated. They are addressed to specific situations and problems in various churches. If Paul's goal were simply to compose a systematic theology, responses to individual churches would be superfluous. Paul could have simply sent the same *magnum opus* to all the churches once it was completed. No need would exist to write one letter to the Galatians and a very different letter to the Colossians. The Pauline letters, as J. C. Beker reminds us, are *contingent*, written to particular locales and addressing specific circumstances.²

Emphasizing the occasional nature of the Pauline letters does not cancel out their theological contribution. Borrowing from **Beker again, the letters may be directed to particular situations but they also flow from a coherent Pauline gospel.**³ The contingency of the letters does not cancel out a theological worldview. We must mine Paul's theology from the let-

ters addressed to the various churches. **When interpreting the Pauline letters, we must grasp both the contingency and the coherence of the Pauline gospel.** If the contingency of the letters is ignored, Paul's letters become timeless treatises, severed from the historical circumstances in which they were birthed. **If the coherence of Paul's gospel is forgotten, the letters become isolated snippets of Paul's thought, divorced from a larger world view.**

The Occasional Nature of the Letters

If what I have said above is correct, Paul's letters are not systematic treatises, but pastoral responses to problems and situations in his churches. **Galatians is not a measured and calm disquisition on the topic of justification.** Paul counterattacks adversaries who insisted that the Galatians must submit to circumcision in order to be right with God. **The entire letter is a rejoinder to opponents who advocated a return to the Mosaic law.** Similarly, **Philippians is not merely a delightful little manual upon joy.** Substantial grounds exist for thinking that the Philippian church was rent by disunity (Phil 1:27-2:4; 4:2-3).⁴ Paul wrote the letter to unify the church, so that they would live ardently for the cause of the gospel. Virtually everything in the letter is designed to attain this specific goal. **In Colossians certain adversaries trumpeted ascetic practices, the observance of the sabbath, festival days, and "the worship of angels" (Col 2:18).** **Scholars debate whether the Colossian philosophy hails from mystical Judaism, a pagan-Jewish syncretism, or**

even a form of Gnosticism. The profile of the Colossian philosophy should not detain us now. We must see, however, that the letter addresses a deviant teaching, which threatens the Colossian community.

The occasional character of the letters is evident in 1 Thessalonians where Paul responds joyfully to recent news that the Thessalonians have persisted in the faith despite trials and persecutions. The letter closes with various exhortations so that the believers will be strengthened for the rest of their earthly sojourn. The focus on eschatology (1 Thess 4:13-5:11) indicates that confusion existed over this matter for these new Christians. Apprehension continued over eschatological matters in Thessalonica, and so Paul needed to address such issues again in 2 Thessalonians. Often scholars have identified the Pastoral letters (1-2 Timothy, Titus) as manuals for church organization. Describing the letters in such a way, however, is fundamentally misleading, for they are not miniature monographs on church structure. Paul wrote all three letters because false teaching menaced the churches.⁵ I am not denying that all three letters have much to teach us about church structure today. Any contemporary application, however, must first grapple with the first century context in which the letters were written to ensure that the historical particularity of the letters is not erased. Moreover, we must also beware of lumping together the three Pastoral Letters indiscriminately. Titus is addressed to a church that was recently established, and there are indications that the church is more rough-hewn than the church in Ephesus (addressed in 1 Timothy), which had existed for a number of years.⁶ The situation in 2 Timothy is different yet again. The call to suffer for the

gospel takes center stage. All of the examples cited teach the same lesson: When we read the Pauline letters, the occasional nature of the letters must be etched into our consciousness.

In the history of interpretation Romans has been classified as a theological treatise.⁷ Describing Romans as a full exposition of Paul's entire gospel is understandable, for it is certainly the most comprehensive of all Paul's letters. Topics like faith, hope, sin, justification, the law, the death of Christ, the Christian life, the role of Israel, and ethics are all examined extensively. And yet a number of themes are missing in Romans, or at least lack any detailed treatment. The reflective christological statements of Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-20 really have no parallel in Romans. The return of Christ is assumed in Romans, but it is only referred to in a glancing way in contrast to 1-2 Thessalonians where Christ's return is prominent. The theology of the church, which is beautifully portrayed and explained in Ephesians, does not have the same focus in Romans. Nor is there any mention of the Lord's Supper in Romans. Other lacunae could be mentioned, but the point is obvious. Even though Romans is deeply theological, not all of Paul's theology is contained in the letter. Indeed, more and more scholars believe—rightly in my view—that Romans was addressed to a specific situation in Rome.⁸ Both Romans 9-11 and 14-15 imply that tensions existed between Jews and Gentiles in Rome. I would suggest that Romans was written to unify Jews and Gentiles, so that they would support Paul's mission to Spain. If Roman Christians disagreed with Paul's gospel, they could scarcely endorse its extension to Spain. Therefore, Paul had to tackle the issues that were cru-

cial for bringing Jewish and Gentile Christians together. It is not surprising, then, that the law and justification, the place of Israel, and the matter of eating clean foods arise in the letter. Paul does not merely examine these issues as “topics” needing responses. He explains them in the light of his gospel, so that the Romans will have deep comprehension of the issues involved. **The only other letter that could qualify as a theological treatise is Ephesians.** Certainly the letter does not contain a comprehensive exposition of the Pauline gospel since some themes from other Pauline letters are omitted. Some have suggested that even here Paul responds to false teaching, though this seems doubtful since clear references to opponents are lacking. Perhaps the letter is an encyclical, sent to a number of churches in Asia Minor, and this might account for its more expansive feel. Richard Longenecker’s designation “tractate letter” seems to be fitting in the case of Ephesians.⁹

Letters or Epistles?

How should we understand the Pauline compositions? Adolf Deissmann early in the century argued that they should be designated as letters rather than epistles.¹⁰ Epistles were artistic works, designed for a larger audience and intended to last forever as literary compositions. Letters, on the other hand, were addressed to specific situations, dashed off to meet the immediate needs of readers. Paul, Deissmann insisted, did not write careful literary compositions that were intended for posterity, which were intended to function authoritatively in the life of the church over the years. He wrote in the ordinary language of his day in response to situations as they arose.

Deissmann, despite the validity of some of his insights, overstated his case. All would agree that Paul wrote occasional letters, addressed to particular circumstances in the churches. It is also true that the ordinary language of Paul’s day was utilized, an insight that was clear to Deissmann when he compared the language of the Pauline letters to the papyri. Nonetheless, most scholars no longer see Deissmann’s sharp cleavage between letters and epistles as credible. First, even though Paul’s letters responded to specific situations in the churches, they show every indication of being carefully constructed. The distinction between Paul’s letters and most letters from the papyri collections is evident at this very point, for Paul’s letters have a literary quality lacking in the papyri. Indeed, some contemporary scholars believe that Paul’s letters are patterned after Greek rhetoric (see below). Even if this latter theory is incorrect, the proposal itself calls into question Deissmann’s thesis, for the theory would not even be seriously considered if the letters were not carefully structured.

The second feature of the Pauline letters, which was overlooked by Deissmann, is their authoritative character. The letters were not merely private missives. Paul wrote them as an apostle of Jesus Christ, and he expected them to be read in the churches and obeyed (1 Cor 14:37; 1 Thess 5:27; 2 Thess 3:14). The authority of the Pauline letters is communicated by the admonition to public reading. In the synagogue the OT scriptures were read aloud, and Paul expects *his letters* to be read and his admonitions to be heeded. It is instructive as well that the Colossians are enjoined to pass his letter on the Laodiceans (Col 4:17). Even though Colossians is addressed to specific circum-

stances in that church, Paul believes it will be useful to the Laodiceans as well, demonstrating that his instructions had a significance that transcended local circumstances. This is not surprising because Paul believed his instructions in the letters were authoritative (Gal 1:8; 1 Cor 14:37). His letters were not merely good advice but were part of the gospel (cf. 1 Thess 2:13). Thus, Deissmann underestimates the authoritative status of the Pauline letters and the extent to which letters addressed to one church could also apply to another.

Mirror Reading in the Letters

Thus far we have seen that Paul's letters are occasional in nature, and yet they are also authoritative. The majority of the letters address specific situations in the churches, and Paul often counters false teaching. Our ability to reconstruct the teaching of opponents will help us gain a sharper profile of Paul's own instructions, for we shall understand more clearly the circumstances he faced. A disadvantage arises immediately, for we learn about the opponents only from Paul's perspective. Morna Hooker remarks that we are placed in the position of hearing only one end of a telephone conversation.¹¹ The historical particularity of the letters surfaces here, for a detailed description of the situation of the letters was unnecessary for the readers since the letters were written to them, and they knew their own circumstances. The Galatians, for instance, scarcely needed from Paul a full portrait of those proclaiming the other gospel. And yet for readers in the twentieth century a summary of their activities and beliefs would be enormously helpful. We are reminded that the letters were not written to us but to people who lived nearly two thousand

years ago.

A particularly vivid example of the historical distance between the first readers and us emerges in 2 Thessalonians 2:5-7. Paul informs the Thessalonians that he is merely reminding them of his oral instructions since they already know what is restraining the mystery of lawlessness from erupting. They know who the restrainer is because Paul already communicated such orally. He does not bother to tell them again since they are already well instructed on this point. Modern readers, on the other hand, are frustrated by Paul's indirect reference to the restrainer, and we cannot identify the restrainer with certainty. The perplexity of scholars is evident by canvassing some of the proposals concerning the identity of the restrainer. Commentators have said the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, Satan, the government, Paul as a missionary, etc. The disparity of interpretations reveals our historical distance from the first readers. The Thessalonians knew who the restrainer was since Paul told them, whereas certitude eludes us.

Three other situations in the Thessalonian letters are of the same nature. The Thessalonians were apparently convinced that fellow-believers who had died since coming to faith were at a disadvantage when the Lord returned (1 Thess 4:13-18). What precisely were the Thessalonians thinking? Why did they think that believers who had died were at some disadvantage? Many theories have been suggested, but we must admit that certainty eludes us. We know *that* they thought that Christians who had died were impaired in some way, but we do not know *why* they believed such. A similar problem emerges in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Apparently the Thessalonians were convinced that the

day of the Lord had arrived or was impending. Paul clarifies that this cannot be correct since the apostasy had not yet occurred and the man of lawlessness had not been revealed. We are interested in knowing what led them to think that the day of the Lord had arrived, but Paul does not fill us in on their thinking process since both he and they knew the answer to that question! **Once again we learn *what* they were thinking, but we are frustrated if we try to discern *why*.** In this latter instance I have my own suspicion. I suspect that the Thessalonians thought the end had arrived because of the intensity of persecution (2 Thess 1:3-10). Such a judgment can only function as a guess, for the text does not specify the reason. I am not suggesting, incidentally, that such guesses are historically worthless. Any attempt to make sense of historical documents involves some reading between the lines, and most would agree that some readings are more viable than others. **I am only pointing out that our need to guess was not shared by the first readers.** The last example hails from 2 Thessalonians 3:6-11. We learn from this text that some in the church were idle and lazy. Why were they acting that way? Many scholars suggest that they were idle because they believed that the end of history was coming soon. I am of the opinion that this view is probably correct. But once again we must note that Paul does not inform us as to why the Thessalonians were indolent and slothful. **In reading the Pauline letters we often know *what* is happening and are much less certain as to *why*.**

When we attempt to reconstruct the situations Paul addresses in the churches, our knowledge is partial. For example, a comprehensive understanding of the Colossian philosophy (Col 2:8), which

threatened the Colossian church, is not available to us. We could possibly conclude that attempting to delineate the features of the Colossian philosophy is pointless since the validity of our reconstruction is uncertain. It is imperative at this juncture to make some necessary distinctions and to avoid extremes. First, we can understand the basic message of every Pauline letter without a comprehensive understanding of the situation. Even the original recipients of the letter to the Colossians did not have a complete grasp of what was at stake since total understanding is impossible for human beings. On the other hand, they knew the situation much better than we. And yet we can understand the letter to the Colossians even if we grasp imperfectly the Colossian philosophy. Our inability to pin down every feature of the Colossian philosophy does not produce despair about the meaning of the letter as a whole. The letter itself provides enough information so that we can understand its basic message. We can apply this principle to the Pastoral Epistles. Identifying the adversaries in these letters is extraordinarily difficult, for the opponents are vilified but their views are not expounded in any detail. I would suggest that we can still grasp the message of these letters even though we lack much information about the opposition. The second point is related to the first. If we believe in divine providence, we are confident that God has given us enough information *within the confines of the individual letters* to understand them. No extra-biblical information provides the key by which they will be unlocked for future generations.

Third, we should not conclude from the above that study of the situation informing the letters is unnecessary, for our

understanding of the letters can be sharpened, confirmed, or even called into question through such research. Extrabiblical research may provoke us to re-examine the text afresh so as to discern if we were reading our views *into the text*. For example, whether Colossians 2:16 refers to the Jewish sabbath or to pagan observance of the same is significant when we interpret the text of Colossians. Other primary sources from the ancient world, both Jewish and Hellenistic, can help us to resolve this issue. Fourth, the principal means by which we discern the circumstances addressed in the Pauline letters is from the letters themselves. We must beware of imposing an outside situation upon the letters. For instance, in previous generations some scholars read Gnosticism from the second and third centuries A.D. into the New Testament letters, so that the opponents in almost every Pauline letter were identified as Gnostics. Virtually no one advocates the Gnostic hypothesis today, for it is illegitimate to read later church history into first century documents. The Gnostic detour could have been avoided if scholars had read the Pauline letters themselves more carefully, for evidence for full-fledged Gnosticism cannot be read out of his letters. Scholars are prone to engage in “parallelomania” where information from the Dead Sea Scrolls or Nag Hammadi or the Church Fathers is imposed upon the New Testament documents.¹²

The method used to identify the opponents in the Pauline letters is crucial.¹³ I would suggest the following principles, which overlap in some respects. The internal evidence from the letter itself must be primary in delineating the opponents. This principle has already been mentioned, but it must be stated again

since it is often overlooked *in practice*, even when it is subscribed to theoretically. Scholars desire to provide a sharp profile of the Pauline adversaries, and thus they are tempted to fill out the local situation from evidence outside the letter. In my opinion Clint Arnold commits this error in his fine work on the opponents in Colossians.¹⁴ **Arnold rightly documents the pervasiveness of magic in Asia Minor during the period when Colossians was written. What is lacking, however, is any firm evidence that magic was actually the problem in the letter to the Colossians.**

There is no reference *in Colossians itself* to magic, spells, invocations, conjurations, sorcery, etc. Many religious movements vied for the attention of the populace in the first century. We need primary evidence from the letter itself to establish a particular religious influence in the letter under consideration. Sharon Hodgins Gritz falls prey to the same error in her analysis of 1 Timothy when she posits the influence of the mother goddess Artemis cult.¹⁵ Certainly such a cult functioned in Ephesus, but Hodgins Gritz fails to show that the cult lies behind the situation in 1 Timothy. To see a connection with the Artemis cult on the basis of sexual impurity (1 Tim 5:11-14) and greed (1 Tim 6:3-5) is unpersuasive, for these sins, as we all know, may emerge in almost any religious movement.¹⁶ Hodgins Gritz does not explain adequately how myths and genealogies (1 Tim 1:3-4), devotion to the Mosaic law (1 Tim 1:8-11), asceticism (1 Tim 4:1-3), and knowledge (1 Tim 6:20-21) relate to the Artemis cult. The features of the Artemis cult appear to be superimposed upon the contents of 1 Timothy.

The internal evidence of the letters may also be ignored in the attempt to provide a *global* view of the Pauline opponents.

F. C. Baur, in his magnificent attempt to write a history of early Christianity, went astray at this very point.¹⁷ Baur assumed that the opponents in *all* the Pauline letters were Judaizers. Therefore, he could raid all the Pauline letters (i.e., those he considered to be authentic) to garner information about the Judaizers. Baur does not practice a sound historical method here, for he needs to establish the opponents inductively from each letter instead of simply assuming that the adversaries are the same in each letter. A careful comparison of Galatians and 1 Corinthians is instructive. The opponents in Galatians are very likely Judaizers as Baur himself suggested, but to read the same out of 1 Corinthians is highly questionable since the features present in Galatians (e.g., an insistence upon circumcision for salvation) are lacking in 1 Corinthians. Walter Schmithals follows the same path as Baur in suggesting a single front opposition in all of Paul's letters.¹⁸ Schmithals departs from Baur in identifying these opponents as Gnostics. The same tendency to come up with a totalizing scheme in which all the letters become grist for one mill is evident. To sustain his hypothesis Schmithals is forced to argue that Galatians 3-4 contains traditional material unrelated to the situation at Galatia.¹⁹ Some of the evidence in the letter itself, according to Willi Marxen, may actually mislead one about the identity of the opponents.²⁰ In this latter instance, the hypothesis trumps the inductive material present in the letter. Instead of wresting the material of each letter in support of some global scheme we must derive the opponents from an inductive analysis of the letters themselves.

The next principle to be considered was

also mentioned above. Documents from a later date must not be read into the Pauline letters. Once again Baur and Schmithals function as bad examples. Baur posited a distinction between Pauline and Petrine Christianity, and one of his bases was the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies of the second century A.D. A document from the next century, however, is not a secure foundation for discerning the circumstances when Paul's letters were written, for too much time has elapsed to assume that the situation is similar. Schmithals committed the same error by reading the Gnosticism of later church history into the Pauline letters. For example, Schmithals identified the opponents in Galatia as Gnostics. This is illegitimate, for we cannot assume that circumstances in the second or third century A.D. existed in the first century. The full-fledged Gnosticism of later church history did not exist in the first century A.D.²¹ An incipient form of Gnosticism was present, but Schmithals makes the error of reading later Gnosticism into the first century documents. Richard and Catherine Kroeger follow in Schmithals's footsteps in positing the background to 1 Timothy.²² They call the heresy "proto-Gnostic," but in fact they often appeal to later sources to define the false teaching.²³ External evidence can only be admitted if it can be shown that the religious or philosophical movement was contemporary with the New Testament.

Internal evidence from the letter is primary in delineating the opponents. How do we discern the situation of the letter using internal evidence? Explicit statements about opponents are the most important in reconstructing the teaching of adversaries. We can discern from Galatians 1:6-7 (cf. 5:10), for instance, that some

were proclaiming a different gospel in Galatia. We also know from Galatians 6:12-13 that they were advocating circumcision, and some Galatians were contemplating circumcision (Gal 5:2-4) and the observance of the OT calendar (Gal 4:10). In Colossians Paul explicitly refers to a philosophy that was threatening the faith of his readers (Col 2:8). We are also informed that the errorists prohibited certain foods and drinks, observed various days and festivals, and worshiped angels (Col 2:16-23). In 2 Corinthians Paul says the adversaries are peddlers of God's word (2 Cor 2:17), commend themselves to the Corinthians (2 Cor 3:1; 10:12-18), boast about their credentials (2 Cor 5:12; 11:18), claim to be super-apostles (2 Cor 11:5-6; 12:11), and demand payment as apostolic messengers (2 Cor 11:12-15), criticize Paul as fleshly (2 Cor 10:2) and hypocritical (2 Cor 10:10-11), act tyrannically (2 Cor 11:21), appeal to their Jewish heritage (2 Cor 11:21-23), and demand proof of Christ speaking through Paul (2 Cor 13:2-3). On the other hand, it is much more difficult to discern whether opponents actually exist in 1 Thessalonians. Paul nowhere refers to them expressly. Yet some scholars believe that adversaries are in view when Paul defends his apostleship in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12. It is also possible, however, that Paul rehearses his ministry so that the Thessalonians will imitate his behavior. I conclude that explicit statements clearly demonstrate the presence of opponents and perhaps reveal some of the elements of their teaching, and yet the lack of express statements does not prove opponents did not exist. In the latter instance, it is much more difficult to reach a definite conclusion.

Explicit statements are fundamental in discerning opponents in Pauline letters,

and yet other passages in letters may yield information about the situation if they cohere with or shed light on explicit statements. We have already seen from explicit statements in Galatians that opponents exist and are demanding circumcision. Nowhere in Paul's discussion of the law in Galatians 3-4 does he mention circumcision, and yet we rightly infer that Paul's words on faith, the law, the Spirit, and righteousness are in response to the Judaizing threat. Similarly, the segment on Paul's apostleship in Galatians 1-2 most likely rebuts an attack on the same by the Judaizers. No unambiguous statement demonstrates that Paul defends himself against criticism, though such an idea is implied by both Galatians 5:11 and 6:17. Moreover, Paul's defense of his apostleship in the very first verse signals a counterattack against the agitators since this defensive tone is distinctive in his greetings. It is also sensible to think that opponents of Paul would criticize him as a messenger in order to substantiate their own gospel.

The validity of appealing to sections of the letters that are not explicitly polemical can also be defended from Colossians. We know from Colossians 2:18 that the philosophy promoted "the worship of angels." This information is extremely useful in interpreting the rest of the letter, for in the Colossian hymn Christ's superiority to and creation of "thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities" is featured (Col 1:16). Almost all scholars agree that these are angelic powers, and Christ's pre-eminence over them is proclaimed because the opponents were overestimating the importance of angels. Similarly, God has disarmed, exposed, and triumphed over angels through Christ (Col 2:15). No explicit statement about the

opponents exists in this verse, but it is hard to believe that they are not countered here. Similarly, the word “fullness” in Colossians does not appear where Paul sketches in the teaching of the philosophy. And yet the word appears both in the Colossian hymn and in Paul’s response to the philosophy (Col 1:19; 2:9-10). We cannot be certain, but it is probable that the opponents claimed that fullness was attained by following ascetic practices, observing days, and through devotion to angels.

The same method can be employed in 2 Corinthians. We have seen above that a fair bit of information about the opponents can be derived from explicit statements. Other parts of the letter, then, may yield information about the situation. For instance, it is probable that the opponents called into question Paul’s reliability in 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:2. Indeed, Paul’s apology for his ministry (see esp. 2 Cor 2:14-7:4) is likely a response to his adversaries.

I am scarcely suggesting a fail-safe method for detecting the historical situation of Paul’s letters. The fragmentary nature of the evidence precludes such confidence. And yet radical agnosticism should be eschewed as well. We often have enough information to gain a fairly clear, though not a perfect, outline of the opponents. What is fundamental in tracing the outline of the adversaries or in delineating the historical situation that precipitated one of the Pauline letters is the text of the letter itself. Scholars have gotten off track by reading data from later church history into the letters, by coming up with some global picture of the opponents that suppresses the evidence from individual letters, or even by imposing some contemporary parallel religious movement upon the letters. We must

decipher the teaching or views of the adversaries from the letters themselves, acknowledging carefully what we do know and what is only conjecture. At the same time information from extrabiblical sources may be very useful in confirming or refuting some hypothesis about the identity of the opponents. The evidence from the letters themselves is fundamental, but it does not follow from this that other evidence should be overlooked.

Rhetorical Criticism

In recent years Paul’s letters have been investigated from the standpoint of rhetorical criticism.²⁴ Did Paul use the patterns of argumentation and structure recommended in the Greco-Roman handbooks, especially in the works of Quintilian and Cicero? Many scholars now answer such a question in the affirmative, and a growing body of literature reflects the attempt to comprehend Paul’s letters as rhetorical compositions. Rhetoric can be classified into three types: 1) judicial; 2) deliberative; and 3) epideictic. Judicial rhetoric is the language of the law court where language of defense and accusation predominate, and guilt and innocence are under consideration. Deliberative rhetoric summons human beings to consider the future, seeking to persuade or dissuade them from a certain course of action. When speakers use epideictic rhetoric, they are celebrating common values or aspirations, or indicting something that is blameworthy. Most rhetorical speeches have four elements: 1) the *exordium* which introduces the speech and attempts to create empathy for what will follow; 2) the *narratio* which contains the main proposition and background information relevant to the argument; 3) the *probatio* in which the arguments for the

proposition are set forth; and 4) the *peroratio* in which the whole argument is summarized and brought to a ringing conclusion so that the hearers will be persuaded.

The work which seems to have launched rhetorical criticism in Paul is Hans Dieter Betz's commentary on Galatians.²⁵ He divides Galatians as follows, identifying it as a judicial apologetic letter:

Prescript 1:1-5

Body 1:6-6:10

Exordium 1:6-11

Narratio 1:12-2:14

Propositio 2:15-21

Probatio 3:1-4:31

Paraenesis 5:1-6:10

Postscript (containing *Peroratio*) 6:11-18

Betz's work is enormously interesting, and we can immediately see the plausibility of the structure proposed. Indeed, one of the benefits of rhetorical criticism is that it reminds us that the Pauline letters are carefully structured and written. Nonetheless, there are serious questions that finally render Betz's proposal doubtful.²⁶ First, the *exordium* in Galatians hardly creates good will with the audience. Instead of thanking God for his work in their lives Paul expresses astonishment at their departure from the gospel (Gal 1:6-11). No attempt to establish rapport with the readers is evident here! Second, much of Galatians is comprised of parenesis (Gal 5:1-6:10), but parenesis has no place in the rhetorical handbooks. Third, Betz does not provide any literary examples of an apologetic letter which would function as a comparison with Galatians. Fourth, Paul's Jewish background is completely ignored in the composition of the letter.

Some scholars have responded to Betz by suggesting that Galatians should be

classified as deliberative rather than judicial rhetoric.²⁷ Seeing Galatians as fundamentally persuasive in intent seems correct, and yet it is still questionable whether it conforms so precisely to the pattern of Greek rhetoric. Rhetorical schemas have been suggested now for virtually every Pauline letter. The detailed suggestions seem to suffer from the problem of imposing a form on the Pauline letters that does not fit them precisely. The unique features of his letters can easily be extinguished by some pre-fabricated pattern that squelches what the letter actually says.

This is not to say that the new rhetorical approaches are without value. They remind us that the letters are carefully structured and crafted, for the new proposals would not be worthy of serious consideration if Paul's letters were organized poorly. Moreover, Paul was probably familiar with such rhetoric to some extent, for he was an educated person and the impact of Hellenism was evident even in Palestine.²⁸ Even if he was unaware entirely of Greek rhetoric (which is unlikely), it still follows that we could detect some rhetorical features in his letters since the rhetorical handbooks identify elements of effective communication that are used even by those who know nothing of Greek rhetoric. Nevertheless, we must seriously question whether he actually structured entire letters in accordance with the rhetorical handbooks.²⁹ The rules of rhetoric in these handbooks were designed for *speeches* not for written discourse. Rhetorical handbooks rarely refer to *letters*, and they do not contain prescriptions in terms of the type of argument employed (judicial, deliberative, or epideictic), nor do they recommend the following of a certain outline (*exordium*,

narratio, probatio, peroratio). Stanley Porter concludes his study of the impact of the rhetorical handbooks upon letters by saying, "There is, therefore, little if any theoretical justification in the ancient handbooks for application of the formal categories of the species and organization of rhetoric to analysis of the Pauline epistles."³⁰ It is also instructive that early church fathers did not identify the Pauline letters as conforming to Greek rhetoric.³¹ A number of the fathers were familiar with or trained in rhetoric, and yet they do not give any indication that they understood Paul's letters to be patterned after such rhetoric. If anything, they sometimes seemed embarrassed by the rudeness of his style. The most serious problem with classifying the Pauline letters as rhetoric has already been mentioned: the detailed schemes appear to be imposed upon Paul's writings.

Epistolary Features of the Letters

Examining the epistolary features of Paul's letters is more promising than rhetorical criticism. All of Paul's letters consist of the opening, the body, and the closing. The opening of letters usually has four elements: 1) the sender (e.g., Paul); 2) the recipients (e.g., the Philippians); 3) the salutation (e.g., grace and peace to you); and 4) prayer (usually a thanksgiving). Interpretive significance can be discerned from Paul's variation from the pattern and from what he emphasizes in the opening. For example, the defensive tone of Galatians 1:1 is unparalleled in the Pauline letters, suggesting that the opponents call into question the legitimacy of his apostleship. Paul not only lists himself as the sender in Galatians 1:2 but also mentions "all the brothers with me." With these words he communicates the truth

that the gospel he preaches is not merely his private opinion. All the believers with Paul acknowledge it as well, and so the Galatians are not renouncing Paul alone if they repudiate his gospel. Usually Paul announces himself as an apostle, but in Philippians 1:1 he designates both Timothy and himself as "slaves." Why does he avoid the term apostle? Probably because the Philippian church suffered from some division, and thus Paul represents Timothy and himself as models for the Philippians. Dissension is overcome through living like a servant, not by claiming authority over others. The surprising reference to "overseers and deacons" (Phil 1:1) may also signal that they play a central role in the problems surfacing in the Philippian church. Since Paul typically begins with a thanksgiving, the lack of the same in Galatians 1 is significant.³² Paul is not thankful but astonished with the defection in the church. Usually the opening of the letter is brief, consisting of two or three verses. Again Galatians stands out since the opening consists of five verses. The longest opening of all is found in Romans, for here Paul writes to a church that was not established by him, and so he emphasizes his unique apostolic role and the gospel he proclaims to establish a common bond and understanding from the inception of the letter.

The substance of Pauline letters is found in the body. Here the Pauline letters display remarkable creativity, and no consistent pattern is readily observable. The task of the interpreter is to trace Paul's argument carefully, letting the text itself dictate the structure.³³ The body of the letters highlights the distinctive nature of the Pauline letters. Despite some overlap with other letters in the Greco-Roman world, they also have unique features,

features that demand thorough and careful interpretation.

The closing of letters is also interpretively significant, though the pattern varies, and discerning where the closing begins may be difficult.³⁴ The following elements are often present, and I will cite only two examples for each, though more could be given: 1) travel plans or personal situation (Rom 15:22-29; 1 Cor 16:5-9); 2) prayer (Rom 15:33; 1 Thess 5:23); 3) commendation of co-workers (Rom 16:1-2; 1 Cor 16:10-12); 4) prayer requests (Rom 15:30-32; Col 4:2-4); 5) greetings (Rom 16:3-16; 1 Cor 16:19-21); 6) final instructions and exhortations (Rom 16:17-20a; 1 Cor 16:13-18); 7) holy kiss (1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12); 8) autographed greeting (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11); and 9) a grace benediction (Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 16:23-24). The closing of Romans is particularly significant, and this is evident from its length alone (either Rom 15:14-16:17 or 15:22-16:27). The contribution of the closing in interpreting letters is aptly illustrated from Galatians 6:11-18, though it must be observed that the importance of the closing varies from letter to letter.³⁵ The autograph formula (v. 11) signals the weight of the closing, for Paul writes with large letters to emphasize the significance of what follows. What is most striking are the contrasts between the opponents and Paul. They boast in the circumcision of the Galatians (vv. 12-13), but Paul boasts in the cross of Christ only (v. 14). The agitators “avoid persecution for the cross” (v. 12), but Paul “accepts persecution . . . for the cross” (v. 17), and bears the marks of that persecution upon his body.³⁶ The adversaries are attempting to force circumcision on the Galatians (vv. 12-13), but Paul views both circumcision and uncircumcision as *adiaphora* (v. 15). The oppo-

nents live under the power of this world (v. 14), but Paul has been inducted into the age to come, “the new creation” inaugurated by Christ (v. 15). A careful reading of the closing discloses that the fundamental issue in Galatians is the cross of Christ. Paul summarizes the major issue in the letter by reminding his readers of the significance of the cross (see also Gal 1:4; 2:19-21; 3:1, 13; 4:4-5; 5:1, 11, 24). Since the closing reprises central themes of the letter, we are also given help in defining “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16). Paul labors throughout the letter to emphasize that all those who belong to Christ are children of Abraham and share the blessing of Abraham. It is quite likely, then, that he uses the term “Israel of God” to designate both Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ, summarizing one of the major themes of the letter at its conclusion. Reading the closing of the letter may cast significant light on the rest of the letter, especially when the closing is more extended as in Galatians and Romans.

Doing Pauline Theology

It is impossible in a brief essay to tackle adequately the task of doing Pauline theology. In some ways Paul’s theology is more difficult than that of any other writer in the New Testament because all thirteen letters must be assessed in order to determine his theology. Some might even think such a theology is impossible since the letters were written to specific situations. We should remind ourselves again of Beker’s distinction. Paul’s letters were directed to *contingent* situations, but his advice for particular communities stemmed from a *coherent* gospel. Paul did not respond spontaneously and uncritically to every circumstance that arose. He responded to each new situation in the

light of the gospel of Jesus Christ he proclaimed. At the end of the day, however, seeing coherence in the Pauline gospel is a *theological* judgment. New Testament scholars must not think that they are merely objective historians, free from any dogmatic biases. The history of New Testament theology reveals the naivete of many of its practitioners, since they claimed to be doing “objective” historical research without any presuppositions. Such a claim was naïve, for they actually operated from an Enlightenment worldview that excluded the possibility of the miraculous. Adolf Schlatter rightly noted that the historical work of some is fundamentally atheistic.³⁷ At the same time we can learn much about Pauline theology, even from those who have a naturalistic worldview. Such scholars may have detected themes in Paul’s writings that were squelched by the theological commitments of other scholars. Conservatives may be so committed to their respective theological systems that they obscure segments of Paul’s theology. Scholars who are free from such systems may perform a service for us in helping us see what is really there, even if they deny the fundamental truth of the Pauline gospel. The task of Pauline theology is not an easy one, for dangers exist on every side. No one approaches Paul neutrally, and thus we must examine afresh the legitimacy of our presuppositions. And even after we have done this, we may not see what Paul says because of our own cultural or psychological limitations. Opening up ourselves to other scholarly work on Paul may remove some blinders that hindered us from seeing what is truly there.

When we do Pauline theology we must be careful to interpret each letter on its own terms. In other words, we must

beware of reading Romans into Galatians, or Romans into the Pastoral Epistles. Each document must be interpreted in light of its own unique context. Otherwise the distinctive contribution of, say, 2 Thessalonians may be suppressed. Similarly, we may become so entranced with a particular theme that we fail to see or may even squeeze out another theme in Paul. For instance, Paul’s famous teaching on justification by faith (e.g., Rom 3:21-4:25) may prevent us from seeing that he also teaches that believers must do good works in order to inherit eternal life (e.g., Rom 2:5-11; Gal 5:21; 6:8-9; 1 Cor 6:9-11).³⁸

Conversely, we must beware of going to the other extreme and insisting that we can learn nothing about Galatians from Romans. If Paul was a coherent thinker, then we would expect that he would return to some major themes often, and that his teaching on these themes would be consistent. Thus, if a verse or a paragraph is somewhat obscure or difficult to comprehend in Galatians, we may gain insight into Paul’s meaning if the same subject is discussed in Romans. Naturally the danger of reading Romans into Galatians must be avoided. On the other hand, if the letters are segregated from one another in a rigid way, insight into the coherence and unity of the Pauline gospel will be overlooked. Obviously much more can and should be said about Pauline theology than is possible in this brief essay on interpreting Paul’s epistles. To have said nothing at all would be even worse, for the impression would be given that Paul’s letters could be understood apart from any theological framework, for a grasp of the whole of Paul’s theology provides wisdom in interpreting his individual letters, just as intensive exegesis in the letters sheds light on the whole of his

theology.

Applying Paul to Today

Paul's writings have endured two thousand years because most readers have believed that they are part of the canon of scripture and that they speak authoritatively to our lives. Knowing how to apply Paul's letters to present circumstances, therefore, is a crucial issue.³⁹ Given space constraints I will limit myself briefly to some observations on the cultural particularity of Paul's letters. The contingency of the letters creates a distance between Paul and us, which makes their applicability uncertain. What message is there for us when Paul asks Timothy to bring him a cloak and parchments (2 Tim 4:13)? We certainly cannot do what Timothy presumably attempted. Nor have I ever met a Christian who thought that fellow-believers who had already died were at some disadvantage at the resurrection (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-18). Apparently the Thessalonians believed that those whom they loved and whom had died were at such a disadvantage, for reasons that are now lost to us. Paul goes to some lengths to say that the believing dead will precede the living at the resurrection, and that the believing dead will not be left out at the resurrection, and yet most modern believers have never thought that their deceased beloved will suffer some detriment because of their early demise.

The cultural particularity of Paul's letters is evident in a number of texts. Should we prescribe wine for stomach problems (1 Tim 5:23) or greet one another with a holy kiss (1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26)? Should women wear shawls (1 Cor 11:2-16) or be prohibited from speaking in church (1 Cor 14:33b-36)? Should we pattern our worship services after Paul's

instructions in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33? Do Paul's words on slavery constitute an endorsement of the practice (Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:22-4:1; 1 Tim 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10)? Should wives submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18), and are they confined to working at home (Titus 2:3-5)?

Two errors must be avoided at the outset. First, we could dismiss Paul's teaching altogether, arguing that we cannot apply it to today since circumstances have changed dramatically. Such a verdict confines Paul to his day, and is a frank acknowledgment that his teaching does not constitute a word from God for us. Second, it would be an error to apply Paul woodenly to our culture. Some might think that if Paul prescribed wine for stomach aches, then wine must be the best remedy for stomach problems even today. Or, some might think that we must literally practice the holy kiss since Paul instructed believers to greet one another that way. Others might insist that women wear shawls or veils or their hair tied up onto their heads in a bun (scholars disagree on what the custom was). We know that some Christians previous to and during the American Civil War defended slavery on the basis of biblical instructions. Transporting Pauline admonitions to our day *carte blanche* is unsatisfactory, for the occasional nature and historical particularity of the letters are ignored on such a scheme. Before applying the text the specific situation addressed must be explored, and we must also recognize that our culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century is remarkably different from the culture of the Greco-Roman world.

What positively can we say about applying Paul's letters to contemporary society? First, the whole of Paul's theology must be taken into consideration. Our

application may be distorted if all of Paul's words on a particular theme are not consulted. For example, Paul's words on women being silent in the church are not the only text about women in Paul. All of his teaching must be consulted before suggesting an application, and in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Paul defends the legitimacy of women praying and prophesying in the assembly. Another danger, on the other end of the spectrum, also exists. We may suppress the relevance of a particular text in order to sustain a "general" teaching that is more congenial to our way of thinking. For instance, the text on women being silent in the church may be excluded altogether, so that it does not play any role when we formulate Paul's teaching on women. The whole of Paul's teaching must be included when we consider how it relates to us today. Engaging in such a task can be extraordinarily difficult, for it involves careful exegesis of all the texts and the formation of a theory as to how they all relate. Both induction and deduction play a role in the process.

Second, in every text a principle or norm must be deduced. Once again the difficulty of the task must be acknowledged. The principle we formulate may veer away from or even distort Paul's instructions. Interpreters disagree over what is culturally limited and what is a norm for all time.⁴⁰ Norms that transcend situations are rooted in God's nature or the created order. It follows from this that admonitions to live in love, or truthfully, or righteously still apply today because they correspond to God's nature. Other commands are relevant because we are God's creatures. Therefore, we should be humble and not proud. Other admonitions apply because they are rooted in God's created order. Polygamy and

divorce are excluded by God's intention in creation, for he made one man and one woman (Gen 2:18-25). Similarly, homosexuality, though it is fiercely debated today, is prohibited since it violates God's creation order (Rom 1:26-27). Giving a holy kiss, however, is not clearly related to either God's nature, our role as creatures, or God's created order. It seems to be a particular cultural practice of churches in the Greco-Roman world. Demanding it today would be awkward to the extreme in some cultures. It does not follow from this that no norm exists in such a command. The principle underlying the admonition is that fellow believers should greet one another warmly, but the specific way we greet one another may vary from culture to culture. Similarly, to insist that we all take wine for stomach aches is a wooden application of the text. Paul was recommending the medicinal means available in that day. Today we might recommend an antacid for those with frequent stomach ailments. The principle of the text is not hard to grasp. Those suffering from disease should use the requisite medicine. We also learn from this that Paul did not expect every one to be healed, and actually encouraged the use of medicine for illnesses.

How should we assess the injunction for women to wear shawls? The interpretive issues are particularly vexing in this case. Paul appeals to the relationship between the Father and the Son as the ground for his admonition (1 Cor 11:3). He also grounds the admonition on the relationship between men and women established during creation (1 Cor 11:8-9). On the other hand, it is hard to see how the wearing something on one's head represents a universal norm. The injunction seems similar to the holy kiss in this

regard. Probably the best solution is to see a norm or principle that lasts for all time, i.e., women are to prophesy in the assembly with a demeanor or manner that does not subvert male headship. At the same time, the specific practice is culturally limited, for very few people today conclude that women are rebellious if they fail to wear shawls. Could the same principle apply to 1 Timothy 2:11-12 where Paul prohibits women from teaching or exercising authority over men? We should be open to an affirmative answer. Some scholars suggest that the principle is that women who are uneducated should desist from teaching or exercising authority. Others maintain that women who have fallen prey to false teachers should refrain from teaching. In my estimation both of these suggestions fail, for they cannot be sustained from a careful exegesis of the text.⁴¹ So in this case the principle and the wording of the text coalesce. Once again the comments here are too brief to handle the issue of application satisfactorily, but it is hoped that they will stimulate further thinking, for ultimately we study Paul's letters to do what they say.

Conclusion

Interpreting the Pauline epistles is no easy task, though it is a joyful one. Readers must recognize the historical distance between Paul's letters and our own day. The letters are not systematic treatises, but occasional documents sent to churches struggling with specific problems. Understanding the circumstances of the letter or the Pauline opponents in the letter is of immense help in interpretation. Readers must also try to discern the structure of the epistle that is being studied. The openings and closings of letters are of especial importance since Paul may foreshadow or

summarize main themes at the beginning and end of his letters. Typical epistolary features should be identified. Departures from the usual pattern signal a distinctive emphasis. Analyzing the body of a letter is more difficult since each one is distinctive. Here readers must be sensitive to the structure of the argument, allowing each letter to make its own contribution. The task of Pauline theology is also complicated since we have thirteen letters but no coherent treatise that weaves all into a logical system. But we also believe that Paul was an inspired writer who was a coherent theologian. Satisfying presentations of his thought can be and have been produced, even if a comprehensive and definitive Pauline theology is impossible. Finally, Paul's letters are the word of God and they speak to today. We should not succumb to the hermeneutical nihilism that despairs of understanding or applying Paul's letters. Hard work is certainly involved, but the Spirit of God enables us to apply the historical and authoritative word of Paul to our world.

ENDNOTES

¹This essay is from the forthcoming book titled *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. by D. A. Black and D. S. Dockery with the permission of Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN.

²J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 11-16.

³Ibid.

⁴Supporting the idea that Philippians was written to unify the church is Davorin Peterlin, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians in Light of Disunity in the Church* (SupNovT 79; Leiden: Brill, 1995). Unfortunately in making his case Peterlin overstates his

thesis.

⁵For a fine exposition of this view see G. D. Fee's commentary *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988).

⁶Cf. L. T. Johnson, *Letters to Paul's Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996) 212-213.

⁷This view has a long history. For a modern proponent of the view see A. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1949) 4.

⁸For a defense of this view of Romans see T. R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 15-23.

⁹R. N. Longenecker, "On the Form, Function, and Authority of the New Testament Letters," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 104-105.

¹⁰A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts in the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927) 228-241; idem, *Bible Studies: Contributions Chiefly from Papyri and Inscriptions to the History of the Language, the Literature, and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988) 3-59.

¹¹M. D. Hooker, "Were There False Teachers in Colossae?" in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament*, ed. B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) 315.

¹²For the danger of parallelomania see the famous article by S. Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *The Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962) 2-13.

¹³See especially J. M. G. Barclay, "Mir-

ror Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1987) 73-93; J. L. Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents: The Question of Method in 2 Corinthians* (JSNTSS 40; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990).

¹⁴C. E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

¹⁵S. Hodgkin Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991).

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 114-116.

¹⁷See F. C. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ, His Life and Work, His Epistles and His Doctrine*, 2 vols. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1876).

¹⁸W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971) and *Paul and the Gnostics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972).

¹⁹For Schmithals view of the Galatian opponents see pp. 13-64 in *Paul and the Gnostics* and his more recent article, "Judaisten in Galatien?" *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 74 (1983) 27-58.

²⁰Willi Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament: An Approach to Its Problems* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968) 53-58.

²¹So E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983).

²²R. C. Kroeger and C. C. Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992). For devastating criticisms of the Kroegers's method see S. M. Baugh, "The Apostle among the

Amazons," *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994) 153-171; A. Wolters, "Review: I Suffer Not a Woman," *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993) 208-213; R. W. Yarbrough, "I Suffer Not a Woman: A Review Essay," *Presbyterion* 18 (1992) 25-33.

²³Arnold (*Colossian Syncretism*) appeals to magical papyri that are also post New Testament (2nd and 3rd century A.D.). He makes a good case, however, for the stability of invocations and curses over the centuries. Thus, the principle of dating must not be applied rigidly. On the other hand, I am less convinced when he appeals to mystery religions and Mithraism to inform the Colossian situation. The late date of the sources renders any influence improbable.

²⁴For a useful introduction to Greek rhetoric see G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1984); cf. also B. L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); D. F. Watson and A. J. Hauser, *Rhetorical Criticism of the Bible: A Comprehensive Bibliography with Notes on History and Method* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

²⁵H. D. Betz, *A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

²⁶For an evaluation of Betz see W. D. Davies, P. W. Meyer, and D. E. Aune, "Review: Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia by Hans Dieter Betz," *Religious Studies Review* 7 (1981) 310-328.

²⁷See e.g., R. G. Hall, "The Rhetorical Outline for Galatians: A Reconsid-

eration," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987) 277-287; J. Smit, "The Letter of Paul to the Galatians: A Deliberative Speech," *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989) 1-26. The improbability of Smit's thesis is attested by his theory that Galatians 5:13-6:10 was inserted into the letter later by Paul.

²⁸This point is disputed. For an entrée into the discussion see J. A. D. Weima, "What Does Aristotle Have to Do with Paul? An Evaluation of Rhetorical Criticism," *Calvin Theological Journal* 32 (1997) 458-468.

²⁹See especially the article by Weima, "What Does Aristotle," though I am less certain that Paul was uninstructed in Greek rhetoric. In contrast to Weima I also think it is possible that Paul's negative comments about rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 must be restricted to his preaching, so that they do not rule out the use of rhetoric in his writings. I think Weima is correct, however, when he says that evidence is lacking to substantiate the use of such rhetoric in Paul.

³⁰S. E. Porter, "The Theoretical Justification for Application of Rhetorical Categories to Pauline Epistolary Literature," in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference*, ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 115-116.

³¹For this point see Weima, "What Does Aristotle," 467.

³²The prayer section often foreshadows important themes in the letter. See P. Schubert, *Form and Function of Pauline Thanksgivings* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1939); P. T. O'Brien,

Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul (Leiden: Brill, 1977); G. P. Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers: Prayer Passages in the Letters of St. Paul* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

³³For a method of tracing the argument in Paul see T. R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 97-126.

³⁴See J. A. D. Weima, *Neglected Endings: The Significance of Pauline Letter Closings* (JSNTSup 101; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994).

³⁵My work here depends especially on the essay by J. A. D. Weima, "Gal. 6:11-18: A Hermeneutical Key to the Galatian Letter," *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993) 90-107.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 94.

³⁷For A. Schlatter's programmatic essay on doing biblical theology see his "The Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics," in *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, ed. and trans. R. Morgan (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1973) 117-166.

³⁸See e.g., T. R. Schreiner, "Did Paul Believe in Justification by Works? Another Look at Romans 2," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 3 (1993) 131-158.

³⁹For a fuller discussion on how to apply the text to today's world see W. J. Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), esp. 325-360.

⁴⁰T. Theissen helpfully explores some principles for applying Paul to today in "Towards a Hermeneutic for Discerning Universal Moral Absolutes," *Journal of the Evangelical*

Theological Society 36 (1993) 189-207.

⁴¹For my understanding of the text see T. R. Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15: A Dialogue with Scholarship," in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, ed. A. J. Köstenberger, T. R. Schreiner, and H. S. Baldwin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 105-154.