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Paul The Letter Writer

Paul's Persuasive Prose: The Case of Philemon

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Part 1: The Letter Opening

Welcome to this presentation entitled Paul, The Letter Writer. Paul's Persuasive Prose. The Case Of Philemon. The goal of this presentation is to convince you that Paul is a skilled letter writer, and that he crafts his letter with the kind of persuasive ability that, well, the modern reader typically misses.

Well, perhaps we should get started with an example. And the example I want to give you is about a high school sweetheart, which we'll mean Jack and Jill. And this is, I'm afraid, a bit of a tragedy, but Jack and Jill get accepted at different universities. And so in the fall time amid much tears and sadness, they part company and go their separate ways. But they manage to keep their love life alive through the writing of letters. And even though they're not particularly conscious of it, their letters quickly developed by a rather fixed pattern, or style or structure. Well, this goes on for a few months. And finally, Jack comes up with some money and gets to travel to Jill. But alas, things really don't go that well. They don't really pick up where they last left off. And so when Jack parted company from Jill, he was a little bit nervous about their relationship. And so you'll understand that when the next letter came from Jill, he was very eager to see what it says. And it started off this way. She wrote "Dear Jack." Now that doesn't seem so significant to you, but it did to him because you see all of her previous letters didn't use the adjective "Dear," but the superlative "Dearest Jack." And so when he saw that less emphatic "Dear Jack," he got nervous. And so he quickly scan the contents of the letter, he didn't look in great detail, but just to briefly see what she said. And she wrote, "I'm so busy here the professors give us tons of readings and assignments, way more than we ever had in high school. I have hardly any free time to spend with my new friends last week, my dormmate and I went to cool concert" and so on. And this maybe doesn't seem so significant to you, but it did to Jack, because all of her previous letters began the same way. She would start off by saying things like, I miss you. I can't wait to see you again. It's so stupid that we're at separate schools. And then after that kind of lovey-dovey, catch up kind of talk, then she would go ahead and talk about the facts and figures of her life, what was happening.

Well, Jack is really getting nervous now. And so he jumps to the bottom of the letter and notices how she signs the letter. She writes "Love, Jill." And again, that may not seem so significant to you, but it did to him because you see, he had a pet name for her. He always called her "Jilly." And she always used that pet name to kind of conclude their previous letters. And so this time when he saw the words "Love Jill," he knew he was in deep, deep doo doo.

Well, the point of this illustration is what is to show that information is communicated not just by what we say, but by how we say it. Or in this case, information is communicated not just by the content of the letter, but by changes in the form and the structure of the letter.

And in a very similar way, this is true for the apostle Paul, if you lay all of Paul's letters side by side, you see they have a rather fixed pattern or structure to them. And when Paul deviates from that structure, when he changes what he normally does, I suggest you it's never by accident or fluke chance, but it's always deliberate. It's always conscious. More importantly, it's always linked in some way to the message that he, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was led to say. And so I'd like to suggest to you how we can be better readers of Paul's letters. To understand first his form and his structure, so that we'll have eyes to see when he deviates and changes from that form and structure, it is significant for interpretation.

Well, this isn't just an idea unique to me. There are some other scholars who have noticed this. I have one quote here, I think that is a helpful one for us to consider. Calvin Roetzel writes, *"Once the letter-writing conventions, which Paul used are understood, the alert reader will also find clues to Paul's intent in his creative use of those conventions as well."*

Let me unpack that quote a little bit for you. First, he says "once the letter writing conventions," now conventions, this is not a reference to like the Jaycees getting together in an annual way. Conventions are a fixed phrase, a stereotyped formula unique to letters. For example, if you're going to write a letter, you don't have to think very hard about how it's going to start. It's going to begin by you saying, "Dear so and so." That's a convention of our modern letter writing letters today. Namely, do you open it with the word "Dear," and ending it too, you also won't have to think very hard about it, you'll sign "Sincerely." That's another letter writing convention, a fixed formula, a stereotype phrase of letters today.

And so, here Roetzel is saying that we first have to understand the letter writing conventions of Paul's day. And we don't have them today. And so naturally, we're not so familiar with them. And so we have to kind of go back in time and look at letters in that day. Thankfully, we have many letters that have survived, particularly from Egypt, in order to understand the kind of popular letter writing conventions that Paul knew about and his readers knew about, and that the apostle employs in his letters.

But then Roetzel goes on to say, "the alert reader," that adjective "alert" is important. If you're the sleepy reader, if you're the kind of reader who's not aware of these letter writing conventions, if you're the kind of reader of Paul, who doesn't recognize that he's a skilled letter writer, and he changes and adapts these things, well, then you're going to miss out on some key information. We have to be alert, we have to have eyes to see this literary feature in the apostle's correspondence. And then he says the alert reader will also find clues to Paul's intent. I mean, isn't that the purpose of exegesis, to understand what the author, in this case, Paul, was intending to write? And then finally, this last phrase is important: In his - that is, Paul's - creative use of those conventions. Paul doesn't just in a slavish way, copy exactly what all other letter writers of that day were doing. Paul is skilled enough, he is gifted enough to change, to adapt, to make alterations, in such a way to his letters, that they better or more persuasively communicate what he, again, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was led to say. So there's a lot of important

ideas in this brief quote. It serves as a kind of a thesis statement for what I hope to prove to you in this presentation.

Well, the first thing you have to do is we have to understand what Paul normally does in terms of his form and structure. And Paul has four basic elements to his letters. They consist of the opening section, the Thanksgiving section, the body or the letter body and, finally, the letter closing.

And the first thing we have to do is we have to look at each of these sections more carefully. And we want to first understand what Paul normally does, because if we don't understand what his usual pattern is, how are we ever going to be able to know when he deviates from that pattern where he does something different? And so let's spend the next little while beginning in the first part of Paul's letters, namely, the letter opening.

The letter opening has three parts. It consists of the sender, the recipient, and then the opening greeting. And I'm going to go a little bit deeper and just look at each one of those in greater detail. That means we first start off with the sender, the very first part of the letter, the letter opening, and the first part of that letter opening, we call that the sender unit.

So what does Paul normally do? If we look at all of his letters, what is his typical or expected pattern? Well, he has four things typically, in the sender unit. He has first his name. Today, we always put our name at the end of the letter. In that day, it was very common to put your name at the beginning of the letter. And actually, it's always "Paul." And it almost always is first, except in a few cases, when you have a letter of petition. When you're writing to somebody who's in more powerful position than you are and perhaps asking them to do something on your behalf, you might honor them by inverting the word order. And so by Paul having his name first, he clearly doesn't write to his churches from a position of inferiority, rather, as we'll see from the title that he uses later on, write always a position of authority.

Now mentioning the title, the second thing found after his name is indeed a title. And by far the most common title he uses is "apostle," though in a couple of letters, he adds the term "servant."

Then third, he has a short descriptive phrase indicating the source of that apostleship. So the title is just given. Now he spells out where he got that position, and it's usually the short phrase "of Christ Jesus," or sometimes the other prepositional phrase "through the will of God."

And then there's a fourth thing that Paul adds, and this isn't so common actually to letters of his day, he includes the name of a co-sender. It's not rare. There are other examples in that day of authors include co-senders, but it's not a very common or widespread practice. And this, of course, raises some question as to what purpose Paul might have and including co-senders what function it has. And though there's some debate about that, I think a good case can be made that in some sense, it has an authenticating function. The idea of more than one witness and Paul usually chooses the co-sender with care. It's usually somebody who has some history or connection with the church to whom he's writing. And that proves that Paul has maybe inside information or more authoritative information about the church to whom he is writing.

So those are the four major elements that Paul includes in his sender unit. And if we had to recreate, let's say, the lost letter of Paul to the Laodiceans. You don't look surprised, do you? I mean, you did know that Paul wrote a letter to the Laodiceans that we don't have. There are other letters Paul wrote that we don't have. For instance, he wrote four letters to the Corinthians not to our first Corinthians is actually the second letter. And our second Corinthians is actually the fourth letter. And we know that he wrote to the Laodiceans, because in his letter to the Colossians, he says, you guys read the letter I wrote to Laodicea, and have the Laodiceans, read the letter I wrote to you.

And so if I gave you an assignment, and the assignment was recreate the hypothetical opening of Paul's last letters to the Laodiceans, that actually would be an easy assignment for you to do. You would say, I know how it begins, it would begin first with his name, Paul, then he would give himself a title and the most common title he would use is apostle, and then he has to give the source of that title, normally of Christ Jesus, sometimes additionally by the will of God, and then he would have a co-sender. And we know and that time of his life when he was in house arrest in Rome, he had Timothy with him, and so we'll give him the co-sender Timothy, and call him our brother. By the way, Paul carefully distinguishes usually his position from that of his co-sender, it's always Paul and apostle, and Timothy, the brother or in First Corinthians Paul an apostle and Sosthenes, the brother. So this is what Paul normally does.

Well, now that we're armed with this information of Paul's normal or expected pattern, let's apply it to Philemon. I've chosen Philemon for the simple fact that it's the shortest of Paul's letters and it's the easiest for us to use in a brief presentation like this. So we look at the letter opening of Philemon. And we see if Paul does normal things or anything unusual here.

So it starts off with his name, Paul, and you said yourself, that's normal, that's expected and it is. And then the next thing comes is a title. But notice here we have something unusual, instead of the expected title 'apostle,' or sometimes the additional title 'servant,' we have the title prisoner. Now, perhaps you're a bit skeptical, and I understand why you're saying to yourself, Well, duh!, He wrote "prisoner" because, well, he was a prisoner!" In other words, you're wondering whether I'm reading too much into this change. But I have a comeback for you. Paul was also a prisoner when he wrote Ephesians. He was a prisoner when he wrote Philippians. He was a prisoner when wrote Colossians. He was a prisoner when he wrote Second Timothy, and in none of those letters, does he use the word 'prisoner.' Only in Philemon. And so this raises the question that Paul has deliberately changed his title, and it somehow has significance for the rest of the letter that he's about to write. So how might that be? How should we understand this change? Not as something by accident or fluke chance, but as a conscious choice by the apostle and skilled letter writer that he is, he's thinking about how this will better function, how this will better serve his persuasive purposes in this letter. Well, I want to suggest to you that well, first of all, Paul, many times in this letter refers to himself as a prisoner. It's not just in this opening verse one, but it's also four other times in this letter. In verse nine, Paul says I, Paul, now a prisoner of Christ Jesus, in verse 10, he talks about Onesimus, whose father I became while I was a prisoner or in prison. In verse 13, Paul says, I was hoping to keep him in order that he might serve me on behalf of my imprisonment for the gospel. And then finally, at the letter he refers to Epaphras my fellow prisoner. Oh, and by the way, Paul says did I tell you that I am a prisoner?

You see, this is a very short letter and yet five times in this brief correspondence, Paul highlights the fact that he is a prisoner.

Now, what function might this have what is called Game by these repeated references to his imprisonment? Well, some scholars at least the few have eyes were the alert reader to notice this change think that perhaps Paul is trying to bring out a sympathy vote. Paul is going to ask Philemon for a favor, and now he highlights the bad situation he's in and thereby puts pressure on him to accede. I want to suggest to you that it's a slightly different purpose. If we read the letter carefully, Paul not so subtly suggests that he would like Onesimus, that's the slave that the letter of Philemon is all about, for Onesimus to be returned to him so he can continue to help Paul in his imprisonment. You see, Paul was under house arrest in the city of Rome when he wrote Philemon and even though obviously under house arrest, he couldn't go out and evangelize, he could still carry on his ministry. He could carry on his ministry because he could receive visitors from the various churches that he had founded, and he could send out his helpers, his emissaries and of course, Paul could still keep on writing letters. So Paul had, so to say, a prison ministry. He wasn't really in prison. He was a Roman citizen, so he was more under house arrest. And I'm not thinking about a prison ministry to fellow prisoners but Paul was under house arrest and he continued his ministry through his helpers, people like Timothy and now, apparently, also people like Onesimus. And so Paul, in this letter writes not only for Philemon to forgive the runaway slave, but I think Paul is not so subtly hinting for Philemon to turn around and send the forgiven slave back to Paul, as Paul says, so he can continue to serve me on your - that is your, Philemon's - behalf, in my imprisonment. And Paul foreshadows, Paul anticipates this request, already at the very beginning of the letter. Before he says anything, he highlights his imprisonment at the very, very beginning. So that's in the forefront of his reader's mind, as Philemon receives this letter and thinks about the requests that Paul is giving. So the bottom line I'm suggesting to you is, Paul changed the title not by accident or fluke chance, but he deliberately changed it to [prisoner], probably not so much to evoke a sympathy vote, as it were to kind of set the stage for the implicit request of the letter, namely that Philemon send Onesimus back and help Paul in his ministry from prison.

Well, if you're not so convinced, if you're still skeptical, that's okay, I've got lots more examples, I'm sure I can convince you by the end of our presentation. And so we move on now to the next part of the letter opening. And that is the recipient, the person or people who get this document. And again, we first see what Paul normally does, so that we can better appreciate when he does something unusual or something different. So what does Paul normally do?

Well, he normally has two parts to the recipient. First he has the name of the church and the region where it's located, so 'To the church of so and so.' And, of course that will change from place to place depending where the church is located.

But then secondly, he has what I call a Positive Descriptive Phrase. He calls his readers or identifies them with a short phrase that goes something like this "in God our Father in the Lord Jesus Christ," or "in Christ Jesus" or "loved of God and called to be holy." And this is a positive phrase, because when Paul identifies the reader, if I would say about you that you're a person who's in Christ Jesus, so if I would identify you as loved of God, your shoulder should kind of come up because in a sense, I've praised you I've acknowledged a relationship you have with

God and or Christ. And so this is what Paul normally does, he first has to the church of so and so and then this positive descriptive phrase.

Well, now that we're armed with what Paul normally does, let's go to Philemon and see whether he does what he normally does or something unusual. And we read here "To Philemon, our beloved friend and fellow worker and Apphia our sister, to Archippus, our fellow soldier and to the church that meets at your house." Well, there are a number of things here that are unusual about this recipient. The first thing that we notice is Paul uses the adjective "beloved" to describe Philemon. In Greek, even if you don't know Greek you'll recognize this word *agapetos*, that key biblical word for love. Now again, you're the skeptic and you're saying, "Wow, come on, brother, why No, you're reading way too much into this change. I mean, Christians are into love. And so no wonder Paul identifies him as a love or beloved person." However, I want to suggest to you, despite your objection, that the word love or beloved, that root word occurs a lot in this short letter. Now, I have here an image of an ATM machine, because I want to give you an analogy, I think of what Paul is doing. An ATM machine, my wife and I often come driving up and we pull up our car beside and we deposit something in. And we deposit something into the bank because one day we hope to do something different, we hope to withdraw it hopefully with some interest. And I'm going to suggest to you that Paul in the early part of Philemon, in a sense, deposits something, not money, but praise. As every time I hear the word 'love' I go to 'Ching,' I hear the cash register go as Paul deposits praise. He identifies his reader, Philemon as a person who has been loved by him, and one who also shows love to others. So our verse is verse 1b the opening the letter or Paul identifies him as *agapetos*, loved. But that word occurs two more times in the introduction to the letter in the Thanksgiving section. In verse five, Paul says, Your love - *Ch-ching!* Did you hear the cash register go? - for all the saints. And notice where Paul directs that love. He says, not so much your love for God and our Christ, not that Philemon doesn't love God or Christ, but Paul highlights your love for the saints. I mean, the saints are fellow Christians. Fellow Christians, like, Paul hasn't said yet, this runaway slave of yours who has become a Christian, and I'm going to ask you something about. And then before Paul gets to the body of the letter in verse seven, he also again deposits praise. He says, Your love has refreshed the hearts of the saints - *Ch-ching!* Did you hear the cash register go again, as yet another time Paul identifies Philemon as the kind of person who acts in a loving way toward other Christians? Paul doesn't specify what that what it is that Philemon does, but I'm sure it's a lot more than Philemon going around, you know, hugging people saying, I love you, man. I mean, he's doing something tangible. He's probably providing housing or maybe employment, or money or food, but he's doing something concrete in order to demonstrate love toward fellow Christians.

Well, after three times depositing this praise, identifying Philemon as one who has received love from Paul and Timothy and extended that love toward other Christians, then we get to the body of the letter in verse nine, and it's withdrawal time. Paul says, I appeal to you more because of love. Do you catch that? In fact, the Greek word order stresses the love part. In Greek, the because of love comes before the main verb. A more literal translation is "More because of love, I appeal to you." In other words, I've praised you as a person who loves fellow Christians. Now I'm going to appeal to that love that you extend that love toward a particular Christian, namely a runaway slave who has become a believer under my care, namely Onesimus. And if you still don't quite believe that this is significant when you get to verse 16, and there's some debate, of course, about the meaning of Philemon, but most scholars agree that verse 16, although it's open

to some debate, this verse, this is where the heart of the request of the letter is found. Paul says that you receive this person Onesimus, no longer as a slave, but better than a slave as a, not just a brother, but as agapetos, as a beloved brother. The very same term that Paul used to identify Philemon at the beginning of the letter now is used in the key request, as Paul says, I want you to treat this runaway slave in the same way as a beloved brother.

Well, there's another way in which the letter opening I think has been changed or adapted by Paul and enhances his persuasive purpose. If you go back to the letter opening, you see that it's a lot more than just Philemon who is the recipient of this letter, even though it's written to Philemon, first and foremost, it's also written to, apparently, Apphia. Most people believe that's Philemon's wife, written to Archippus, probably not his son but the interim pastor of the Colossian. Philemon is the wealthy patron who allows his home to be used by the Colossian church. And the pastor of the Colossian church, his name is Epaphras, he has left Colossae and gone all the way to Paul in Rome and now Epaphras has left the pastor Archippus, the interim pastor in charge while he's gone. And then finally, Paul writes a letter to the church that meets at your house. So actually, even though on one hand, the letter is written to Philemon, the singular is used mostly through the letter, Paul, deliberately, in a couple of strategic places, has the plural. And I want to suggest to you that a request made in public is a lot harder to turn down than a request made in private. When you ask somebody to do something in public, well, then everybody's eyes are on that person and they're looking at him and seeing how they're going to respond. Have you ever been to like a fund-raising dinner? You maybe go to a right-to-life event, and you sit around the table with your family and your friends. And then at the banquet, the speaker says something like, "Now you take those pledge cards and you go home and the privacy of your home... No, they don't ever say that, do they? Do they say Fill it out right there at the table right in front of your family and friends. You see, it's harder to turn down a request made in public than one made in private. And so I'm suggesting to you that Paul deliberately makes this very personal and difficult request a public matter. So now everybody in the Colossian church is looking at Philemon and saying "Now, what's he going to do? Paul has asked him to do something for this runaway slave? And is he going to listen to the apostle or not?" This is another part of Paul's deliberate, careful, persuasive strategy. And the question is whether we're one of those alert readers who have eyes to see what Paul is doing in this particular case.

So far, we've looked at the letter opening. And we've looked at the first two elements, we have yet the third one to look at in the letter opening. And that's the greeting. And again, we first have to look at what Paul normally does, so that we can have eyes to see and understand when he does something different.

So what did Paul normally do? Well, it has three elements. The first element is grace and peace. That's what many pastors use in different traditions at the opening, or sometimes the closing of a service, grace and peace. And I want you to understand how each of those terms is significant. Maybe we'll do the second one first, because that probably is the easiest to understand. The word 'peace,' of course, is a Greek word since Paul is writing to Philemon in Greek, but it's also a common Jewish word. Even if you don't know Hebrew probably heard the Hebrew word 'shalom.' And shalom was used not only to say goodbye, but also to say hello. And so it looks as if Paul in his opening letters, uses a traditional Jewish greeting Shalom. Now what about the word grace? Well, in Greek, the word grace is charis (khar'-ece). And it sounds suspiciously

similar to a very common, by far the most common, greeting used in secular letters, in letters by non-Christians. They always or almost always begin with the Greek word, kha-rain. And so it looks as if Paul has taken a secular Greek greeting kha-rain, and he's Christianized that into the word charis. And then he takes a typical Jewish greeting. And so now Paul results in a truly biblically inclusive greeting, grace and peace.

Well, the second element in this greeting is very simple. It's to you, the recipients of, of this grace and peace.

And then thirdly, we have the Divine Source, who is the originator? Where does this grace and peace come from? And it's always from both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And by the way, the grace and peace at the beginning of the letter are echoed in a chiasmic fashion at the end of the letter, where you have grace and peace at the beginning, and then suddenly you get peace and lastly, grace, because Paul is marking the boundaries of the letter and everything in between is then either the Thanksgiving or the body section.

So that's what Paul normally does Grace and peace to you from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, that's what Paul normally does. And we apply that to Philemon, we see grace and peace, we say "That's normal," there's no change there. Then "to you," that's expected, and then we finally see "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." So actually Paul hasn't changed at all the opening greeting of Philemon.

However he does in other letters. If you want a good example of how Paul expands the opening greeting, take a moment and look at Galatians 1:3 to 5. We haven't got time to deal with it here. But there, Paul emphasizes Christ redemptive work as a pre-emptive strike, before he addresses this subject in the body of the letter, he already in the letter opening has an expansion of his greeting, which highlights the salvific work of Christ in contradiction to the Judaizers who are saying that Jesus or belief in Jesus isn't quite enough. You also have to be circumcised, you also have to pay more attention to the law, and so forth and so on.

Part 2: The Thanksgiving

So far, we've looked at the first of the four major parts of Paul's letters. We looked at the letter opening. And so now we move to the next major unit, namely the Thanksgiving section. And in due course, we'll turn to the body and the letter closing.

First of all, we need to be aware that a Thanksgiving section exists. Far too many New Testament readers, even many pastors are completely blind. They think after Paul says grace and peace, they expect Paul to start the body of the letter, the heart of the letter, and he doesn't. Paul always or almost always, first has what we call a Thanksgiving section, in which he sets the stage for the rest of the letter to come. So let's look at this Thanksgiving section a little more carefully.

First of all, what is it and why do we call it a Thanksgiving section? Well, it is a distinct epistolary unit, right? It's a very fixed unit. It's not the opening and it's not the letter body. It's a

very distinct unit within Paul's letters, in which he gives thanks to God for his readers. So his hand is pointing up, I give thanks to God for what you, the readers, are doing. And it's called a Thanksgiving section because he always begins the same way. In Greek he says *eucharisteō*, or *eucharistumen*, I give thanks, or the plural, we give thanks. And hence the name, thanksgiving section.

I have a comic here that I like because this comic writer clearly knows what we're talking about today. He clearly knows Paul's structure or the outline of his letters. Notice already the things that echo what we've talked about. In our session, he begins, that is, the comic, with a name. And he's not a mature Paul, he's just a little kid. So it's not Paul but Paulie and his title. He's not an apostle or a servant. Yet, he's a kid called to be a camper set apart for archery and crafts. And then we have the recipient. And again, it's not to the church of so and so and the positive descriptive phrase, it's more simply, to the parents gathered in the hometown. And then Paul hasn't Christianized His grace and peace yet, right. It's simply greetings. But then notice this next phrase that's found in the comic we read, I give thanks daily for the cookies you sent, I count all my poison ivy as loss. Now, you have to be pretty sanctified to count poison ivy as loss, but the more important point here is, notice how this comic writer knows at the beginning of the letter, before Paul gets to the heart, and soul of what he wants to talk about, or what problems exist in the church, he opens the letter with an expression of thanks. And now you hopefully know that truth too.

Now, a good question to ask ourselves is, Why does Paul do this? I mean, why doesn't he jump right into the heart or the body of the letter? What does he gain? Or more accurately, what function do these Thanksgiving sections have? How do they aid? How do they enhance the persuasive purpose of Paul in the letter? And I suggest to you that these Thanksgiving sections have three important functions.

First, they have what I can call, what I call a pastoral function, a pastoral function. The Thanksgiving section allows the apostle to re-establish his relationship with his readers. We tend to think of the apostle Paul in very high and lofty terms. I mean, for us, he's not just Paul, he's the Apostle Paul. And although we're not Catholic, most of us, he might even be you know, St. Paul. The idea you know, that we believe he's the inspired and authoritative apostle and we say, "Yes, Paul. Whatever you say, Paul. You the man, Paul." But in the first century, that's not always the relationship he had with his readers. I mean, some churches he had a close intimate relationship in which they honored him and his status as an apostle but other churches there was a bit of tension. And what's more, Paul, when he writes to these churches, often this is the first communication he's had with them since he started or founded the congregation. There obviously was no email, there was no phone, there was no Skype or anything like that and so there was no way for Paul to kind of reconnect with his audience until now, until the writing of this letter.

And think about somebody you haven't seen for a while, someone you know that maybe you're somewhat close to but you haven't met in person for a while when you first see them you know, you just can't boom! jump right into whatever big issue it is that you want to talk about with that person. You first have to kind of have some small talk to reconnect with that person. You say, Hey, how are you? You know how you doing? How's your family and so forth. And then after you reconnect with that person, then you can maybe move on to more deeper or serious things.

Well, in a similar way to and Paul writes to his various churches, and especially depending on the relationship he has with that church, whether it's a close one or a little bit of a distant one, Paul can't- well, at least he wisely chooses not to - dive right into the heart of whatever serious matter is going on in the church, but he reconnects with his audience. And the Thanksgiving section allows him to do that.

And allows him to do that in a particular way. If you look at his Thanksgiving sections, they almost always begin the same way. Paul says, We give thanks or I give thanks to God by how? How does Paul give thanks for his readers? it's always prayer. He'll say things like making remembrance of you in my prayers, or I'll say, praying for you. And I'm always impressed with the power of intercessory prayer, that is prayer enough for yourself, but for other people, when people say I'm praying for you, I'm always moved by that because, well, I have enough time praying for myself, let alone other people and, and I'm sometimes taken aback that this person must think about me and care about me so much that they're willing to pray for me even when they don't see me. And so Paul, the pastor, expresses his care, his love for his audience by saying, not only do I get thanks to God for you, but I do so in my prayers. I do so making remembrance of you in my prayers. So that's why I call it a pastoral function. It allows Paul to express his love his care, his compassion for his readers.

A second function that the Thanksgiving has can be called an exhortative function, an exhortative function. Exhortation is an English word, which talks about exhorting, or calling upon, you know, kind of urging people to act or to do certain things. And a Thanksgiving section is at least implicitly exhortative. In other words, people typically want to live up to the praise that other people give to them. I call this persuasion through praise. If I have you in my class, and I say about you, you know, I give thanks to God for you. I mean, you're such a good student, you study hard, you come to class prepared, you ask great questions, you laugh at all my corny jokes. Well, in a certain sense, I'm putting a bit of pressure on you to keep on being a good student, to keep on coming to class, prepare to keep on asking good questions to keep on asking, laughing out my corny jokes. And so when Paul writes to his readers and says, I give thanks to God for your steadfastness of hope, and your labor of love, and so forth, while that puts a bit of pressure on them to keep on demonstrating those very virtues for which he's giving God praise. And sometimes it's not even implicit. Sometimes it's explicit, because in some of the Thanksgivings, not all of them, but in a number of the Thanksgivings, at the very end, Paul will say something like, I pray that that da da da da will happen in your midst. And then he's not very subtle at all, then his readers know exactly what he wants to happen in their life.

I mean, it'd be one thing if I said, for my son, my youngest son is in university, Sam, you know, Mom and I are praying for you, right? But it'd be different if I said, Sam, Mom and I are praying that you will study hard that you use the gifts that God has given to you that you'll act wisely with the freedom that you have, now that you're away from home. You see, then it's not at all subtle, it is an implicit what our son knows we want from him, right?

And so the Thanksgiving section, either implicitly, or in those Thanksgivings that have that closing prayer explicitly exhort the readers to continue in a particular conduct or behavior. And that's another important function an exhortative function that the Thanksgiving section has.

But there's a third function that it has. And this also is very important, it has a foreshadowing function. It anticipates not only the major topics that Paul will be talking about, but also the tone in which this discussion will be held.

I have here on the slide a table of contents, because if I go to a library or a bookstore, and I see a book that's potentially interesting, and I want to know what it's about, I look at the table of contents. Well, in a somewhat similar way, the Thanksgiving section is a table of contents for the rest of the letter to come. It isn't quite so exact, in other words, you know, it gives the page number where it's found, but Paul clearly foreshadows the major themes that he's going to be developing later in the letter. And the Thanksgiving section not only foreshadows the topics, the themes of the letter, but also the tone in which this conversation will be held.

I think it's very important for you to understand the relationship of the author in this case, Paul, with the recipient, whatever their church may be, is it like the Philippian letter or the Thessalonian letters where there's a warm letter? It's a kind of, I love you, you love me, you know, everything is warm and intimate. Or is it frosty cold like the Galatians? O, foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? And those people who are pushing circumcision, I wish they go all the way and castrate themselves. Yeah, that's what Paul says, things are pretty bad and Paul's tone is pretty harsh and strong. Or is it like First Corinthians, it's kind of in between, there's tension in the air and sadly it's going to get worse before it ultimately gets better? The Thanksgiving section foreshadows, all of those important tones too. So it gives us a good context in which we hear the letter being read.

By the way, this is why Thanksgiving sections are sometimes difficult to preach on or to teach on. You know a good sermon or a good class should have one central theme. You know, don't confuse your audience. Just talk about one thing and highlight that for the whole message. And that's hard to do in a Thanksgiving section for the simple but important fact that Paul doesn't do that. Right. He deliberately doesn't take any one theme and develop it in detail. No, he kind of whets people's appetite for what is to come. A modern analogy would be in movies. You know, when you go to a movie theater, right, you sit down, you pay all your money of your popcorn and your pop. And then once you get to watch the movie, right? No, you first have coming attractions, right? They want to entice you, right? They want to tease you with what future movies are coming so that you'll hopefully come back and in a certain sense, that's what a Thanksgiving section does. It's kind of coming attractions, what is Paul going to be talking about in greater detail in the rest of the letter to come?

So these are the three functions. These are the three purposes, I believe why Paul includes in his letter, this Thanksgiving section, he doesn't jump right away to the body of the letter, but he adds this important introductory section, which sets the stage for the rest of the letter to come.

Well, let's look now at Philemon armed with this knowledge of the Thanksgiving section and what it's supposed to do. Let's look now at the Thanksgiving section of Philemon. It actually it's kind of long given how short the letter is as a whole. Paul says, *I always thank* there you have that opening Thanksgiving section, that formula. *"I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith and that you will have a full understanding of*

everything good we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.”

Now did you hear already the first function at work the exhortative function? By Paul saying to find him and I give thanks to God for what your faith in the Lord Jesus, but especially your love for all the saints. Well, that puts implicit pressure on Philemon to keep on demonstrating love for all the saints, including love for this brand new saint, namely your runaway slave Onesimus.

But it also foreshadows this first thing we've already talked about because it was found in the letter opening, but the Thanksgivings section foreshadows the theme of love. Remember, in verse one, Paul identified Philemon with the adjective love, right? You're a person, Philemon, who has been loved by me and Timothy, and now in the Thanksgiving section at once. But twice, he identifies Philemon as one who takes that love and extends it for others, hearing of your love for all the saints. And then verse seven in the Thanksgiving section, I have much joy and comfort because of your love. And again, did you hear the cash register ch-hing ching ching, as Paul deposits, this praise of love? And that sets the stage for the body of the letter in verses eight and nine where Paul says now withdrawal time, right more because of love, I appeal to you da da da da da da and then also foreshadows that key request in verse 16, that you welcome back Onesimus, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave as an agapetso, as a beloved brother. So this is basically a review of the theme we already talked about in the letter opening.

But there are other ways in which the Thanksgiving section foreshadows the rest of the letter. Here's the second one. There are more by the way that I can give you in this lecture. So I'm only giving you a few. There's lots more information if we had time to talk about but here's the second good example of the foreshadowing function of the Thanksgiving section. Paul there uses two words which are kind of striking. He says that you, Philemon, are the kind of person who what? who refreshes the hearts of the saints. Especially that verb 'refresh,' and even more special the word 'hearts.' Now, even if you don't know Greek, you probably know the most common Greek word for heart. If somebody has a heart attack, we say they have a what arrest? They have a cardiac arrest, because the most common word in Greek for hearts is cardio. But that's not the word that Paul uses in the text here. Paul uses a different word. The word is splagchnon, and splagchnon refers to the inward parts the intestines, the in colloquial terms of the guts. Why? Because in the ancient world, it was believed that the deepest emotions weren't here in the heart. Now, the most strong emotions are down here in the belly, in the intestines in the splagchnon, in the guts, I mean, today, if you want to express your love for your significant other, you say, Oh, dear, I love you with all of my heart. However, an ancient world if you really wanted to say it powerfully, would say dear, I love you with all of my guts. If you said that to your beloved, I'm sure he or she would notice, wouldn't they? And so I'm Paul uses the word splagchnon. Now, instead of the word hearts, I'm sure that his readers, and now hopefully us modern readers, would notice.

Now that word splagchnon, though, that rare word or rarer word, that more emphatic word for the emotions, occurs two more times in the letter. In the body of the letter, Paul goes, describes on this semester, runaway slave this way, he says, Onesimus, right, who became my child when I was in prison. He says this one, verse 12, is my very heart. And again, Paul doesn't use the common word, cardio, he says, This one is my very splagchnon, this one is my very guts. So in

the Thanksgiving section, he says, You are the kind of Christian find a man who takes the guts, the inward parts of believers and you refresh them. And then in the body letter, Paul, not so innocently says, you know, this runaway slave of yours, by the way, he's my very guts. He's my very heart. And then we get to the closing of the letter. We're not there yet, but I can't help but refer to it now already. In the closing of the letter, Paul says not so innocently, "Refresh, my heart." Refresh, the same verb that he used in the Thanksgiving section, and heart here again, you're not surprised, is not the common cardio, but the rarer and more emphatic *splagchnon*, guts. Refresh my heart. How can Philemon refresh Paul's guts? Well, Paul says earlier Onesimus is my guts. And thereby if you want to refresh my guts, my heart, you can do what I'm asking you to do for your runaway slave Onesimus.

Are you starting to be convinced now the Paul is a skilled letter writer who very carefully structures and adapts his letters in such a way that it's more persuasive, that he communicates more powerfully the message that he, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was led to say?

Part 3: The Letter Body

Well, we've looked now at the opening and the Thanksgiving section. And now we turn to the body of the letter, the main section of the letter. And here we meet often these conventions that that quote earlier talks about. Those stereotype formulas, those expressions, those fixed sayings that were common to letters of that time. One of the ones we meet here in Philemon is typically called the appeal formula, the appeal formula. And it's called the appeal formula because of the Greek verb always used *parakaleo* in Greek *parakaleo*, which often is translated appeal although in English, sometimes it's translated other ways as 'I urge,' or 'I beseech' and so in English, sometimes you can miss this formula, because of the different ways in which it is translated. But it's all the same Greek word *parakaleo*, which the original readers would have heard and recognized.

Now there was a Scandinavian scholar whose book you see before you who analyzed this formula, other words, he went to secular letters, non-Christian letters of that day, and made a lot of interesting observations about this formula, this appeal formula. He noticed that it has a certain form and a certain function, both of which are found in the apostle Paul. What is its form? Well, there's four parts and we find all of those four parts in Paul's letters too.

It first and foremost is made up of that key verb *parakaleo*, I appeal to you. It also has a synonym, a similar word, it's *aratao* in Greek, I ask you. So, I appeal to you and/or ask you. That's part of the first element of this appeal formula. Then you have the recipients I appeal to you brothers. And then we get a prepositional phrase, and the Scandinavian scholar observed that this prepositional phrase gave the authority by which the person is appealing. So if I would do it, I could say something like this, I, Jeff Lima, you know, a professor of New Testament appeal to you that da da da da. So by me saying, wait a minute, a professor of New Testament, I'm appealing to the authority I have, to ask you to appeal to you to do something. And so Paul, in this text, this well-known text from Romans 12, verse one is appealing to the mercies of God as the ground, as the reason why, his readers in Rome should do what he's now about to say, namely, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, sacrifice holy and honorable before

God. And you see all the texts there from Paul's letters, how often Paul makes use of this formula, a very common formula in his day, and Paul, not surprisingly, then, uses it quite frequently in his letters.

But it's important for you not just to know that this appeal formula exists that will allow you to impress family and friends, but I want to help you much, I think, in terms of better understanding Paul's letter. For that you need to know what function this formula has. Okay?

What does a writer gain or accomplished by using this formula. And it so happens that the appeal formula has two functions, a primary one and a secondary one.

The first function the appeal formula has is it marks transition. It signals a major shift in Paul's argumentation. And that's a very important exegetical or interpretive tool. You may not realize that the original manuscripts of the New Testament are written in Latin we say scriptio continua. They're just continually written. There are no spaces between words. There is no punctuation marking the beginning and ending of sentences. There are no indentation indicating paragraph breaks. It just starts writing and even the middle of the word, they go to the next line. So all of those modern things that we use to mark breaks are, in a sense, artificial. Chapter divisions? They should carry really no inspired authoritative weight in our life. They weren't added until the 10th century AD. And verse divisions? They weren't at until the 14th century AD. So don't begin and end your scripture passage selection only and solely on those kinds of criteria. Now, that doesn't mean that the letter writers or biblical writers, in general didn't leave clues for the readers where to begin, and end. They just left different kinds of clues. They left literary clues or in letters they left epistolary or letter clues.

And so one big clue that I know where Paul begins a new section is wherever he uses this appeal formula. And so it's not surprising that the body of the letter is easily marked in Philemon in verses eight and nine because that's where Paul uses the appeal formula not once but twice so it marks transition. You can see those other texts where it does the similar thing.

But there's a second function that we also ought to know it's an important function. And that is, it's a softer, more user friendly way of asking your audience to do something. In other words, instead of Paul, metaphorically putting a gun to his reader's head and saying something like, by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command you to do so and so. Paul knows often that he has a positive audience that he has a good relationship with his audience, and they're likely to listen to him. And so there's no reason for him to be heavy-handed and pound the pulpit and say I command you, that would only offend the readers. Instead, he can use the more softer, user friendly, I appeal to you. This is a good strategy, by the way, for pastors to follow. It's really not effective for pastors to always stand there and to shout and to yell and to pound the pulpit. There's no need to be that heavy-handed your parishioners love the Lord, that's why they're in church. they're eager to know God's will and to do it. And it's a lot more effective and appropriate than to urge to appeal to exhort your audience in that more softer, user friendly way.

Now, Paul does know, in case you're skeptical, the difference between commanding and appealing. I know that he knows that difference, because right in this letter alone, he contrasts the two. Notice what Paul says here in Philemon, verses eight, nine and 10, it's all one long

sentence pretty well in Greek. He says, Therefore, although in Christ, I couldn't be bold and command you to do what you ought to do, more because of love (ch-ching! Did you hear the cash register the withdrawal time from love?) more because of love, I appeal I Paul, an old man and also a prisoner of Christ Jesus, I appeal second time to you concerning my child, to whom I gave birth in prison Onesimus, and we would add, who is my very guts. You see Paul here contrasts, on one hand, commanding, with appealing. Paul says, I could do the one. But no, no, I'm doing the other. So Paul knows the difference between appealing and commanding. Although if you think about this for a while, this too by mentioning both of them together is part of Paul's persuasive strategy. I mean, he could have just said simply because of love, I appeal to you. Why does he add, I could be bold and command you. I think that's part of Paul's persuasive strategy, too. That would be like me saying to you something like this. Although as a teacher in this course, I have the authority to flunk you and ruin your call to ministry, I would never ever do that. Instead, I simply appeal to you out of love for the Lord, study hard and do well in this course. You see, by my mentioning what I *could* do at the beginning of my comment that kind of puts it on the table and makes you think about something that I possibly could do and in a sense, puts greater pressure on you. And it's not so innocent when Paul says, then, I could be bold and command you. That's not a subtle way of reminding to Philemon what Paul possibly could do. And in fact, later on in the letter, Paul does use that that stronger language. In verse 14, Paul says, in order that you're good work in my mind, namely that you forgive the runaway slave and you send him back to help me in my imprisonment in my prison ministry, my house arrest ministry, that that not be by necessity. Notice Paul mentions necessity, as something that it could possibly be that that he's obligated to do. And then verse 21, which we'll talk about in a little bit, Paul says "confident of your obedience." Just think about that for a minute. You're obedient not to optional things, you're only obedient to necessary things. And so Paul, later on in the letter, in a sense, portrays his request not as something optional, but something that is required something that is necessary, something that requires his obedience.

So that's the appeal formula, not only here in Philemon, but found in Paul's other letters too.

Now, there are many more of these formula. There are many more of these epistolary conventions or fixed expressions, they just don't happen to occur in Philemon. But I want to encourage you to perhaps do some further study and learn what these other letter writing conventions are, so that when they pop up in Paul's other letters, you not only can identify them, remember that may impress family and friends, but it may not help you so much with exegesis interpretation, more importantly, what is the function of these other conventions? What does Paul accomplish or try to do with these stereotyped expressions?

Well, even though there aren't more of these fixed phrases in Philemon, there are other techniques that Paul uses to be persuasive and it's important for us to be the alert reader, not the sleepy reader, but the one who has eyes to see the clever way in which Paul is shaping his message. Not just what he says, but how he says it so that he enhances his persuasive appeal. And there are a number of them found in Philemon.

Here's another example of Paul's persuasive techniques. I call them non-epistolary, because they're not unique to letters. So they are persuasive. They are literary devices of persuading an audience, but they're not unique to letters in of themselves.

But one example of a persuasive technique is what can be called a Pathos Appeal - an appeal to the emotions. Paul says in verse nine, being such a person as Paul, but now an old man and a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Now, you have to ask yourself, Why does Paul call himself an old man? Maybe you say, well, maybe because find him doesn't know how old he is. Well, that's not the case because in verse 19, it's clear that Paul has led Philemon to Christ, so they've obviously had close interaction. And so Philemon knows, well, how old Paul is. So why does Paul highlight his age? Well, some people again, appeal to the sympathy vote, the idea that Paul's an old man and a need and thereby Philemon, you know, won't you help him? I think, actually, it's slightly different than that. I think that this is an appeal to showing respect to one who is older than you. This kind of argument isn't so persuasive in North America, but it is still today in many parts of the world as it was in the ancient world. And many parts of the world still today, the idea of showing reverence, showing deference to someone who is older than you.

I remember I was teaching a number of years ago, I was only 31 when I became a professor. And in those early years, I had a student from Asia from Korea. And we were meeting together to talk about his program. And he said to me, at least at the time, I thought it was completely unexpected. He just said to me, suddenly, I know how old you are. And I kind of said, Well, okay, yeah, you know, it really wasn't a big deal. I didn't understand what was going on. But now, in retrospect, I realized, wait a minute, this student was older than me. And so there was a little bit of ambivalence about how he should act. On one hand, I was the professor and he should show some respect and deference. But on the other hand, he was older than me. And so I think he wanted me to know that he was older than me, and that in some sense, I should show him some respect. And you have that even in the biblical texts, too, from Leviticus, and the extra canonical book, Syriac, about the idea of showing reference or deference to one who was older.

Well, another technique that Paul is engaged in is a pun on his name. He says in verse 11, formally, He that is this runaway slave and this and this was useless to you. But now he's become *useful* both to you and to me. Now, you need to know that the Greek name Onesimus means to be useful. That's why it was a very common name given to slaves, because people hoped that slaves would be Onesimus, they would be useful. And so Paul seems to be punning on the name. He says, formally when he was with you, before he ran away, he was *useless*. And now that he's with me, he's *useful* both to you and to me.

Now, why would Paul make a pun on this name? Well, two possibilities, both of which I think are true. The first general reason would be I think it's clever. When we hear a clever pun like that we kind of smiled to ourselves. And we're either impressed with the person who made the pun or we're kind of favorably disposed toward that other person.

But secondly, notice what Paul does. Paul with this pun, actually draws attention to the kind of loss that Onesimus has endured or caused his owner. Paul kind of downplays the loss. Paul, in a certain sense says, "Now, when your slave Onesimus was with you, Philemon, well, he wasn't very useful to you anyway. I mean, I know you suffered something when he's gone. But actually, now that he's with me, he's actually useful to both you and to me." You see, by downplaying the loss, Paul, I think makes it easier for the request of the letter to be granted. He makes it easier for Philemon to forgive him. I mean, generally speaking, it's easier to forgive somebody who's hurt you a little than somebody who's hurt you a lot. And so again, by downplaying the loss that

Philemon has endured by Onesimus running away, and in a sense kind of spinning in a different way saying, “Well wait a minute, actually, now he's useful to you with me and for on your behalf. Paul,” I think makes it easier for the owner, Philemon to grant the request to forgive him.

And if you're skeptical about this pun, while we still do it today, many of you probably have seen the Got Milk commercials. I was struck by this one, notice what it says at the bottom. And notice that the second word close is capitalized, it says “Look close” with a capital C. And I don't know if you get the pun here but there's a pun on this woman's name, because this woman isn't any old woman but she's a relatively famous actress whose name is Glenn. Close, Glenn Close, hence, the name close is capitalized. And so the pun the command “Look Close” is a pun on her name. And you look at that you say, Oh, that's clever. That's impressive. That's nice, you're favorably disposed toward the message that the person engaged in this pun has made. So we still engage in these kinds of persuasive techniques today.

Here's another persuasive technique that Paul seems to be using in Philemon. And that's the use of the Divine Passive. Now, this involves a bit of explanation about the Greek language, so don't lose me in this somewhat technical explanation.

Now, first of all, let's understand what the word passive means. Right? That's the opposite of active. If I could, I could say, “Weima teaches the class,” right? That's an active voice in the verbal system, Weima is actively teaching the class. I could say the same thing by making a passive I could say “The class was taught by Weima.” Now it's passive.

Now, in the Septuagint, okay, we're going back to Jews in Egypt, the translation from the Hebrew Old Testament, into Greek, right? The Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek, and it's called the Septuagint. Those Septuagint translators knew of the command not to take the Lord's name in vain. And so when they came across certain Old Testament passages, where the text would read the Lord, or YAHWAH, actively did something, they would spin that around and turn it into passive it would be instead of the Lord did something to the people, right, Israel, it would be the Israel was something, and then they wouldn't add by the Lord, they figured by taking out by the Lord, it would be impossible to take the Lord's name in vain. And everyone would know that the person who had done this activity was indeed the Lord. And so now New Testament writers, including Paul, are familiar with what we could call the Divine Passive, where you describe the events in a passive voice. You don't say who's doing it, but it's assumed to be the Divine that is, namely God.

So after that long explanation, we look now at verse 15. And we read, He that is the runaway slave, Onesimus, was separated from you. Now that's passive, right? He didn't separate himself, but he was separated from you. But notice, Paul doesn't say, by whom -who was the person who separated the slave from the owner. And if Paul is evoking this divine passive, the unspoken agent here is God. And if that's the case, Paul is in a very interesting and persuasive way, casting this whole situation as part of God's providence. In other words, Paul is suddenly suggesting to the slave owner that, that “This business of your slave running away, and then you know, coming into my orbit, and then becoming a believer, that didn't happen by accident or fluke chance, that's all part of God's plan.” And so the unstated message is, wait a minute, if you're against what I'm asking in this letter, you're not just against me, but you're against what God has planned or

ordained. And it's one thing to be opposed to Apostle, human person. It's another to be opposed to God Himself. It's the idea of Genesis 50, right, where Joseph said to his brothers, You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good. And Paul certainly thinks that way. You know, in Romans that's a precious verse to many people, especially in times of difficulty that God works all things for the good of those who love Him.

Part 4: The Letter Closing

Well, so far we've looked at the letter opening, we've looked at the thanksgiving section, we've looked at the body of the letter, we have the fourth and final section to look at and that's the letter closing. And the letter closing, frankly, is often neglected by scholars and by parishioners, either because scholars are all worn out from the text by the time they get to the end of Paul's letters, or, or maybe they have a notion that you have that, I don't know where it comes from. But somehow the idea Wow, there can't be anything important in the letter closing, or maybe it's because we don't spend a lot of time carefully writing our letter closings and so we just assume that Paul, and the other New Testament letter writers didn't either.

But I want to suggest you that's not at all the case. Remember, the whole thesis of this presentation is that Paul is a careful letter writer, a skilled letter writer, and he demonstrates that skill. Also, in the letter closing, I happen to have written a book on this subject, it's called *"Neglected Endings. The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings,"* because as I said, a minute ago, many commentators, many scholars, many preachers, too, and teachers neglect the endings of Paul, right, thinking there's nothing important in them. But that's not the case in Paul's letters as a whole and therefore, it's not surprising to find that not the case in Philemon, too.

So let's look at the different kinds of things that often are found in a letter closing, and how they function, how they work, how they aid, the persuasive purpose here in Philemon.

First of all, almost all letters I do think all letters have, but almost all letters, for sure have what's called an autograph. In Greek *graphe* is to write, *Auto* is to write it yourself. In other words, the writer instead of using as secretary, the technical word is in *amanuensis*, would take over from the Secretary *amanuensis* at the end of the letter in the letter closing, and would write the end of the letter in their own hand. And we know that Paul used the secretary and at least six of his letters. How do we know that? Well, five of his letters, he says, I greet you in my own hand, and there'd be no need for Paul to say, in my own hand, unless earlier, the previous part of the letter was written in somebody else's hand, his secretary. And so Paul, who knows that his letters will not be seen by a larger group of people, right, because it's a more communal church context, Paul wants to spell out for his readers that he has taken over from the secretary and now in the letter closing, he greets you right in my own hand.

And we also know the Paul used a secretary because in one of the letters he sort of say, pops his head out of the text. In Romans 16, verse 22, right, we suddenly have this figure come out of the text and say, I Tertius, who wrote this letter greet you in the Lord. And you're reading, hey, who's this Tertius guy that Paul was writing to me. While Paul was writing to you, Paul did write

Romans, but Tertius was his secretary and now at the end of the letter of Romans, Paul will take over from the Secretary and pen some final words in the closing in his own hand.

Now, why does Paul do that's what he does. But why does he do it? What does he accomplished by doing that? Well, not only does he take responsibility for the letter, right, that's what you commonly did in the ancient world, right? When you wrote it in your own hand, that means even though a secretary helped me with the drafting, I'm responsible for the contents, right. And Paul also uses those sometimes to draw emphasis. For instance, Galatians, that angry hot letter that he writes, he ends with the phrase See with what large letters I write to you, in my own hand, it's almost like he's closing in bold, emphatic.

Or in Second Thessalonians, three, he says, I Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark of all my letters, right? You can tell a true letter of Paul from a fake letter of Paul because he writes that ending in his own hand.

And in other letters, as I've already told you, like First Corinthians 16, he says, I Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.

Now here in Philemon, notice what Paul does with the autograph. He says, I am writing this with my own hand, I will repay, I will pay it back. Not to mention that you owe me your very self.

First of all, one of the two functions that it has first phrase, I will pay it back. It's almost like Paul is signing on the dotted line. It's like an IOU and he's personalising, and he's saying, if he has wronged you anything, this runaway slave, right, if you've incurred any kind of loss by his running away, I will pay it back and I'm guaranteeing it by my signature.

But the second part of the phrase is also significant. Paul says Not to mention that you owe me your very self. Technically this is a literary device called *paraleipsis* where the writer pretends to leave something behind. It'd be like me saying "Now I don't want to remind you about the test next week." Well And I just reminded you about the test next week even though I said I didn't want to do that.

Paul says not to mention that you own me, you're very self. Paul is rather heavy handed here. What does Paul mean when you owe me your very self? Well, Paul almost certainly is talking about the spiritual debt that Philemon owes the Apostle. Paul is the one who led him to Christ and so Paul, therefore, is owed something, right? There's a spiritual debt owed to Paul by his convert, Philemon. And now Paul, in a fairly heavy-handed way is calling in this marker. Paul says Not to mention, although he manages to mention it, when he says he doesn't want to, that you owe me your very self. Paul another sense is basically saying, if it weren't for me, you wouldn't know the gospel, you wouldn't be saved, you wouldn't experience the gift of grace and forgiveness. And that's pretty strong argument. Paul says, I'm asking you to do something. Wait a minute, I don't want to remind you that you owe me Wow, you owe me your very self.

One scholar says that, quote, this device, this little *paraleipsis*, this little phrase "is used here to transform Philemon's position from creditor to debtor and so to put him under a limitless moral obligation to comply with Paul's request." That's big words, but it basically says, Wait a minute,

that's putting pressure on the crew, the slave owner Philemon, right to comply to listen to what Paul is asking him to do in this letter.

A second thing found in the letter closing typically are is an hortatory section, some final commands. Paul often introduces it with the word “finally,” not only Paul's hearers, but you too are probably excited when you hear the word “finally,” because then you know this video is going to come to an end, right? And Paul signals that often with the word “finally.” And he usually uses also the address invective in Greek “brothers.”

But then the commands are significant. And notice the two commands here in Philemon one of which in a way we've covered one we haven't. He says Yes brother, I do wish that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord, refresh my heart in Christ. So the first command is I do wish that I might have some benefit from you in the Lord. And here is another pun on Onesimus' name. The verb benefit is another English word for having some usefulness, some gain. Literally in Greek, I couldn't translate it something like this: Yes, brother, I do wish I might have some own Onesimus from you in the Lord. And especially because of the pun on an Onesimus' name earlier in the letter, it's hard to deny the Paul is not again putting on his name here. So to have Onesimus from you is a way of Paul saying wait a minute, I'm reminding you what I asked in the body of the letter. This letter closing is forcing you to look back and to echo or to summarize the main request I gave in the body of the letter.

And the second command we've already talked about refresh my heart in Christ. Remember, heart here isn't the common Greek word cardio, but that rarer and more emphatic word splunkna or guts. And so when Paul says refresh hearts, that can't help but remind Philemon of what Paul said earlier in the letter, not only verse 12, that Onesimus is my heart, my splunkna, my guts, but also what I praised you for the Thanksgiving section. In the Thanksgiving section, I gave thanks to God that you refresh the same verb, the hearts, the guts, the splunkna of the saints. So this is a very clever way in which Paul echoes or looks back to earlier request given in the body of the letter.

There's also something in Paul's letters and in finally an in called a confidence formula. You can see here a book of a scholar who's who studied the body of the Greek letter. Not in Paul's letters, not in the New Testament, but in secular letters. So again, this is another one of those fixed sayings or stereotyped formulas, which are common in the first century, and not so common today. And we therefore have to learn about them. So when we see Paul use it, we don't miss it. Now, I'm not so interested, I mean, I am interested but in the interest of time, we won't focus on the form or the structure of this thing. It makes use of the verb to be confident as to highlight what function it might have. And the function is a little bit of persuasion or obligation through praise. If I go to my son again, and say, you know, let's imagine that he's got this issue in his life. He's got Option A and Option B. And Option A is really the thing that he knows he ought to do, but he really wants to do option B. I come to him and I say now, Sam, you know, you're reaching a point in life where *you* have to make these decisions on your own, mom and dad aren't going to tell you what to do. And then I add this at the end, but we're confident you're going to make the right choice. He may not like that, because it puts pressure on him, doesn't it to live up to the confidence that we, his parents have on him.

And so also, this scholar recognizes this persuasive character to the confidence formula. He says the evidence of a variety of parallels suggests that such expressions of confidence, are usually included to serve the persuasive purpose. Whatever the emotion behind the expression, the function is to undergird that is to support the letters request or admissions by creating a sense of obligation through praise. obligation through praise. Paul uses this later in the letter in the letter closing verse 21, he says, Confident of your obedience, I write to you knowing you will do even more than I ask. Right. So Paul says I'm confident Onesimus pardon me, Philemon, that you're going to do the right thing toward your runaway slave Onesimus. That puts pressure on him. I mean, it's positive pressure, right? It's saying, I expect you to do the right thing, but it does add pressure to accede to the request.

There's also something called an apostolic, Parousia. An apostolic Parousia. Two words here that need to be explained. First, the word Parousia, it's a Greek word, which means often the idea of coming, that's one possibility, I'm going to go back to this, but it more often has the idea of presence. It comes from a Greek verb "to be," "to be with." And sometimes Christians, even those who don't know Greek know this Greek word, because it's used by Paul and a few biblical writers to refer to the Parousia of Christ, namely the coming or the presence of Jesus Christ when He returns in glory. But here, we're not talking about the coming or the presence of Christ, we're talking about an apostolic Parousia, or we're talking about the coming or the presence of an apostle. And one scholar has written an article about this, but other people have thought about it too, and said that this is a persuasive technique that Paul does. What does he do? Paul tries to make his presence more powerfully felt, right. Paul is already present through the writing of the letter. You have to imagine, in whatever situation including Philemon, there's some letter carrier, there is no mail system in the ancient world, you have to find someone to personally deliver the letter. And so there's some person who's speaking the words of Paul, reading the letter that Paul wrote. And so Paul is present already through the reading of the letter. But now Paul does something to make himself more present than he already is. And what are the three ways in which Paul tries to make himself more present than he already is in the reading of the letter?

Well, one, he refers to a future coming, a visit that he might make, or two closely related to that, if he can't come, I'm going to send my representative. That's another way when Paul can be more present. Or third, he can refer to his act of writing the letter. So he refers to I'm writing to you or something like that. So people have an image in their mind as they hear this word, these words read to him, they have an image of Paul physically writing to them.

So these are three different ways in which Paul tries to do this one thing, he tries to make himself more present than he actually is he tries to make his presence more powerfully felt. Now, by the way, I often try to make my presence more powerfully felt when I teach, it's hard for me to do here in the studio, because I'm limited to the camera, I can't move around. But I will, when I teach, I will physically go around from place to place. I'll, I'll get closer to the people to whom I'm talking, I tried to make my presence more powerfully felt. I also tried to be animated right on, I tried it with my facial expressions or my hand motions, or whatever the case may be, I try to make myself more present that way. Now, why do I do that? Why do I try to make myself more powerfully present when I teach? Well, I want my hearers to listen to me. I don't want them to fall asleep. I want them to listen and also understand I do it to be more persuasive.

Well, in a similar way, Paul uses these means to make himself more persuasive. You have a quote there from Robert Funk on the screen before you where he says All of these three ways,” namely his future visit or the future visit of one of his helpers or his act of writing a letter. “All of these three ways are media by which Paul makes his apostolic authority effective in the churches. The underlying theme, therefore is the apostolic Parousia, the presence of apostolic authority and power.”

Well, I think this will become more clear to you when you look at what Paul says here in the end. Philemon, he says, Oh, one more thing, prepare a guest room for me because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. Now a naive reading of this verse, right? A sleepy reader, not an alert reader, right? Who's aware of the skill with which Paul writes, sleepy reader might say something like, Well, I guess this is nice. Paul is optimistic about being released from house arrest and so he just wants to make sure that that Philemon has a room ready for him when he comes. And if that's your reading, don't feel bad, even a very important leading influential scholar like James Dunn says, in his commentary on Colossians, and Philemon about this verse, he says, It is a quote, “a throwaway remark given in the more relaxed mood of the conclusion.” This scholar wants you to believe that that Paul at the end of the letter is kind of finished all the heavy stuff, and he's kind of kicking back relaxing, and he has just this casual, throwaway remark. But I suggest to you that's not really what's going on. I want to suggest you actually this is an implicit threat, a challenge to Philemon to do what Paul is asking him to do. Because what Paul is not so subtly saying is, I'm coming, I'm coming, and I'll be able to hear and see firsthand whether or not you've done what I've asked you to do.

I'll give you a modern analogy, maybe that will help. In my students at Calvin Theological Seminary, I sometimes ask them in the spring, you know where they're going, and what they're going to do for the summer months. And sometimes they'll say, Oh, I'm going here, and I'm going to this place, and I'm going to serve as a pastor there. And then sometimes it'll be a place where I go to once in a while, and I'll say something like, oh, you know, I, I visit that church once in a while or I attend that church occasionally. I look forward to hearing you preach some time. Students never like it when I tell them that. Right? Not because they don't want to see me but they feel some kind of pressure when their professor comes and we'll see firsthand whether they're exegeting the Bible properly, whether they're doing that which their teacher has asked them to do.

And so Paul by saying prepared guestroom for me, because I hope to be restored to you an answer to your prayers. I suggest to you that's a way of Paul saying I'm coming and I'll see firsthand what you've done with my request.

One final thing that we meet in the letter closings are greetings, greetings. And again, often, greetings are not seen to be by scholars and maybe by preachers and teachers to be that significant. I have some comments here about classifying the greetings into a first person type, a second person type and the third person type. But I think the bigger payoff has to do with function. What does Paul gain by having these greetings in his letter closings? Well, they either maintain a relationship, or sometimes they can even establish a relationship. So letter we're not looking at like Romans, For example, Romans has 23 Greetings. And is that significant? It is, because Paul is writing to a church that he didn't found or start, no one knows him hardly at

Rome. And in fact, there's some questions about him. And so Paul named drops in a certain sense, Paul connects himself with as many people as he possibly can in Rome, in order to secure their confidence and trust that they'll accept Him as their divinely appointed apostle and listen to what he is saying to them in the letter to which he writes.

But here in Philemon notice what Paul does. Paul says in verses 23 to 24, Epaphras my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus sends you greetings and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. Now there are a lot of people here that are greeting even in the short letter. And I suggest two things here. One, I think Paul is again making this a public matter. So now not only does everybody in Colossae where Philemon lives knows about it. Remember, he wrote it to not just his wife and the interim pastor, but the whole church. Now everybody with Paul knows about it, and that puts extra pressure on Philemon again.

And what's more, notice the order of the greetings. Paul wrote Philemon the same time he wrote Colossians. And therefore not surprisingly, the greeting list in both letters are almost exactly identical. But there's one important change, Epaphras, remember who is the interim, who's the main pastor of Colossae, Epaphras is bumped to the front of this letter, and he's highlighted because he's called my fellow prisoner, the fifth of these five references to Paul's imprisonment, which we talked about earlier. So Paul highlights Philemon's pastor who is so to say, in prison, either literally or at least figuratively helping Paul out during this time.

Well, I may have done I'm afraid a too good job in this presentation. In other words, I may have not only convinced you that Paul is a skilled writer, a gifted writer, a persuasive writer, I may have moved you too far beyond that, from Paul being a persuasive writer to Paul being a, dare we say, a manipulative writer. And I want to make sure that you don't wrongly conclude that. A couple of responses to that concern, namely, the Paul is yes, persuasive, but not manipulative.

One, we have to compare Paul not with what we consider to be appropriate behavior, but what would be appropriate behavior in that time and in that day. Now, in some cultures today, I might find what Paul doing here to be a little bit sneaky or tricky but in many parts of the world, this is actually an appropriate way to deal with a sensitive matter. You kind of dance around the subject, and you don't outright command somebody to do you leave the door open, and you word it in such a way that the responsibility is on them. That's still true today, in many parts of the Deep South, for instance. I've been told that in the south, if you ask somebody, something to do something, and they want to say no, they don't say no right away, that'd be too offensive, they would say something like, well, that's that's an interesting question. I'm going to think about that and get back to you right? Now, you might judge that I might judge that as being kind of ingenuous, you know, I want you to come out and tell me how you feel. But in certain cultures, that's a more appropriate way you deal with such a matter. And so one way to think about this in the first century, especially when you're writing, you know, to someone like Philemon, right? Paul has to kind of couch his language in a more generalized way. And he still does leave the door open. He doesn't explicitly command the slave owner what to do.

The second thing to remember is, Paul actually is not powerful at all in this situation. Remember, he's in house arrest, he's in Rome, he's over 1000 miles away, and his future doesn't look good.

And Paul isn't rich and powerful. What else can you do but be his persuasive best? What else can Paul do but use these persuasive strategies in the careful writing of his letter?

And finally, and maybe most importantly, Paul is in a position that we're not. Paul is an inspired apostle Paul is led by the Spirit to not only know what God's will is in this situation, but to make sure that his reader or readers hear that will and obey it. I mean, the same thing would be true for me as a teacher or preacher today. Should I be so worried about being manipulative, that I suddenly become a boring teacher or preacher, I don't want to think about colorful words or expressions or analogies. I don't want to speak in any kind of way that you might think I'm manipulative, right? Or if I'm convinced about what God's will is, don't I shouldn't I think carefully about how not only what I say but how I say it, so that you pay attention that you hear and understand, and more importantly, under the leading of the Spirit, do or obey that which you're called to do. And so I would like you to think instead, of Paul this way, as an extremely skilled and careful letter writer. He doesn't dash off his letters in a haphazard way. No, he thinks carefully about not just what he's going to say, but about how he's going to say it. And he involves and he uses a lot of epistolary devices or conventions, and he's skilled enough to adapt them or to change them so they suit his particular purposes. And if you read Paul's letter, not just as letter to Philemon, but his other letters this way, I suggest to you dear friends that that new doors will be opened up to you. And you will be that alert reader who understands what God is saying not only to the various churches in Paul's day through the apostle, but also therefore what God is saying still to the church today.

Thank you.

Paul The Letter Writer
Paul's Persuasive Prose: The Case of Philemon
By Dr. Jeffrey A.D. Weima

INTRODUCTION

☛ Illustration: Letter to Jack from Jill

“Dear Jack: I am so busy here! The professors give us tons of readings and assignments—way more than we ever had in high school. I have hardly any free time to spend with my new friends. Last week my dorm mate and I went to a cool concert....Well, got to go. Love Jill.”

Introduction

“Once the letter-writing conventions which Paul used are understood, the alert reader will also find clues to Paul's intent in his creative use of those conventions as well.” Calvin J. Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul*.

Conversations in Context (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975, 1982) 30.

Form of Paul's Letters

- **The Letter Opening**
- The Thanksgiving
- The Letter Body
- The Letter Closing

The Sender/Author

The Recipient

The Opening Greeting

1. The Sender

A. Its Form

Consists of 4 Formal Elements

i) *Name*

- always “Paul”
- occurs first in keeping with practice of ancient Greek letters
- only in letters of petition, when writing to someone in a position of authority did the recipient's name come first

ii) *Title*

- two titles commonly used:
- “apostle”: all but 4 letters: so Rom; 1 Cor; 2 Cor; Gal; Eph; Col; 1 Tim; 2 Tim; Tit (plus also “servant”)
- “servant”: so Phil; Rom (both); Tit (plus also “apostle”)

iii) *Short Descriptive phrase, indicating source of the title*

- two phrases typically used:
- “of Christ Jesus”: 1 Cor; 2 Cor; Phil; Phlm; Gal; Rom
- sometimes a qualifying prepositional phrase is added: “through the will of God”; 1 Cor; 2 Cor; Eph; Col; 2 Tim

iv) *Co-sender*

Paul typically includes co-sender

Name of co-sender typically given **last** (after the full description of Paul’s name, title and source) and is identified as “brother” in distinction from Paul who normally identifies himself with a more authoritative title (but see Phil 1:1)

in secular letters co-senders occur sometimes in business or official letters but rarely in personal or familial letters

function of including co-senders not clear

The Sender

Luther Stirewalt Jr. proposes that it has an *authenticating* function:

“A convincing accounting for the use both by Paul and by the secular writers is to identify co-senders as personnel who were informed participants in the letter-event and who supplied the requirements for witness to the written message. Thus Timothy, Sosthenes, and Silvanus could at any time authenticate a letter, its origin, and its content” (page 44)

Paul the Letter Writer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003)

Summary: The form of a typical “sender” formula in Paul’s letters is:

- i) Name
- ii) Title
- iii) Short, Descriptive Phrases
- iv) Co-sender

1. The Sender

B. Its Significance in Philemon

Text: “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother”

Unique formal feature:

- use of the title “*prisoner*” to identify himself
- every other letter Paul uses the title “apostle” and/or “servant”; this is only place where “prisoner” is used

What does Paul do in the letter opening?

- Paul changes expected title of “apostle” to that of “prisoner”
- **Point:** “Paul changed the title to ‘prisoner’ due to the simple fact that he was a prisoner!”
- **Counterpoint:** Paul also was a prisoner while writing Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Timothy, and yet title “prisoner” is not used in any of these letters
- Issue: What is the reason for the change?

1st Significance of title “prisoner”:

Title “prisoner” was chosen because of its “emotive and persuasive power” (Dunn, *Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 311)

- Paul’s imprisonment functions as an important backdrop to the letter as a whole
- Paul refers to his imprisonment no less than five times within this very brief letter:
 - v 1: Paul, a *prisoner* of Christ Jesus”
 - v 9: Paul writes that he is currently a *prisoner* of Jesus Christ (“I, Paul, ... now a prisoner of Jesus Christ”)
 - v 10: Onesimus was converted by Paul while he was in *prison* (“whose father I have become in prison”)
 - v 13: Paul hopes to keep Onesimus so that he may continue to help Paul while he is in *prison* (“in order that he might serve me on your behalf in my imprisonment for the gospel”)
 - v 23: Epaphras, “my fellow *prisoner*”

2nd Significance of title “prisoner”:

- Term “prisoner” foreshadows the letter’s *implied* request
- V 21b “knowing that you will do even beyond the things that I am saying”

- V 13: Paul expresses his strong desire to have Onesimus stay with him and help him carry on his gospel ministry while under house arrest: "...whom I was wanting to keep for myself in order that on behalf of you he might serve me in my imprisonment for the gospel" (note the emphasis here given by addition of personal pronoun "I" and use of imperfect)

"The substitution of the expected title 'apostle' with the designation 'prisoner' highlights at the very opening of the letter Paul's imprisonment—an imprisonment that he repeatedly refers to throughout the rest of the letter (vv. 9.10.13.23)—in order to foreshadow the implicit request to have the slave owner send Onesimus back to serve as the apostle's helper" ("Paul's Persuasive Prose: An Epistolary Analysis of the Letter to Philemon," *Philemon in Perspective*, 35)

2. The Recipient

A. Its Form

Consists of Two Formal Elements: i) *Designation of Recipient*

- Typically "church" + name/region where the church is located
- Few letters have "to all the saints" + name/region where saints are located

2. The Recipient

A. Its Form

ii) *Positive Descriptive Phrase*

Paul's letters typically add a short descriptive phrase that positively describes the readers' relationship to God and/or Jesus

- "in God (our) Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1)
- "in Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:1; Col 1:2)
- "loved of God, called to be holy" (Rom 1:7)

2. The Recipient

B. Its Significance in Philemon

(1) "beloved friend": term "*beloved*" (αἰγάφροτις) is key term in letter

Deposit of praise #1: v 1b "*beloved*" Deposit of praise #2: v 5b "your *love* for all

the saints" Deposit of praise #3: v 7 "Your *love*..."

Withdrawal: v 9 “I appeal to you more because of *love*”

Key request: v 16 “no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a *beloved* brother”

(2) Other recipients:

- Paul includes a number of other people as recipients
- Paul thus not so subtly lets Philemon know that his request is not simply a private matter between the two of them but a *public* matter in which other people will be aware of the situation and expect resolution of the problem

Copies sent to secondary recipients

- Request made in public is harder to reject than one made in private

Norman Petersen: “Social pressure on Philemon is secured most conspicuously by Paul’s addressing his letter not only to Philemon but also to Apphia, Archippus, and the entire church that meets in Philemon’s house” (page 99)

3. The Opening Greeting

A. Its Form

Consists of Three Elements:

i) *Greeting/Wish*: “Grace and peace”

- Greek letters of that day typically opened with word *chairein* = literally “rejoice” but colloquially “greeting”
- Paul apparently “christianizes” the secular Greek greeting of *chairein* into the Christian greeting *charis* (“grace”)
- “peace” taken from the typical Jewish greeting *shalom*, used not only in speech but found also in Semitic letters
- Thus Paul seems to be incorporating in a unique way a typically Greek greeting and a typically Jewish greeting

ii) *Recipient*

- “to you”

iii) *Divine Source*

- “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”
- found in all letters except Colossians which has only “from God our Father”
- “from ... the Lord Jesus Christ”

3. The Opening Greeting

B. Its Significance in Philemon

Text: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”

Unique Formal Features:

- None in the opening greeting of Philemon.
- See Galatians 1:3-5 where Paul has added phrases that highlight Christ’s redemptive work as a pre-emptive strike against a Judaizing theology that undermines the sufficiency of Christ’s work of salvation)

Form of Paul’s Letters

- The Letter Opening
- **The Thanksgiving**
- The Letter Body
- The Letter Closing

The Thanksgiving Section

1. Introduction

The Function of the Thanksgiving Section

a. *Pastoral Function:*

The thanksgiving re-establishes Paul's relationship with his readers by means of a positive expression of gratitude to God for their work, growth, and faith. This is important if Paul wants his letters to be accepted and obeyed by his readers. The thanksgivings also reveal Paul’s deep pastoral concern for his readers, as evidenced in the fact that he regularly prays for them.

b. *Exhortative Function:*

The thanksgiving is “implicitly or explicitly parenetic” (Schubert, 26, 89; O'Brien, 141-144, 165, 262-3). In other words, even though Paul is expressing his thankfulness to God, there is an implicit (or explicit) challenge to Paul’s readers to live up to this praise (persuasion through praise).

c. *Foreshadowing Function:*

The thanksgiving foreshadows (1) the central themes and issues to be developed in the body of the letter as well as (2) the letter’s style and character.

3. The Thanksgiving Section in Philemon (vv 4-7)

Text: “⁴I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. ⁶I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. ⁷Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.”

Significance:

a. *Exhortative (Parenetic) Function:* Paul’s thanksgiving for Philemon being the kind of person who demonstrates “love for all the saints” implicitly exhorts Philemon to keep acting this way toward fellow Christians--including his runaway slave Onesimus, whom Paul has not yet mentioned.

b. *Foreshadowing Function:*

(1) Theme of “love”

v 5b: “hearing of your *love*”

v 7: “For I have much joy and comfort because of your *love*”

both occurrences highlight love that Philemon demonstrates not so much to God and/or Christ but towards other Christians: “your love...which you have...for all the saints” (v 5b); his love results in the “hearts of the saints” being refreshed (v 7b)

these deposits of praise add to the identification of Philemon in letter opening as one who is “beloved” (v 1b)

foreshadows appeal of v 9: “because of *love* more I appeal” (note word order which emphasizes “love”)

foreshadows request of v 16: “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a *beloved* brother”

(2) Theme of “refreshing the heart(s)”

- verb "ajnapauvw" here with Paul does not have its common meaning of “rest” but the distinctive sense of “refresh”
- noun splavgcna (“inward parts, entrails”) a rarer and more emotive term than kardiva (“heart”)
- v 7b: “the *hearts* of the saints have been *refreshed* through you”
- foreshadows description of slave Onesimus in v 12 as “this one is my very *heart*”
- echoed by closing command in v 20b “*Refresh* my *heart*”

THE LETTER BODY

1. The “Appeal” Formula

A. **Form:** Four basic elements

Example: *Romans 12:1* “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”

1. The verb: “I appeal”
2. The recipients: “to you, brothers”
3. Prepositional phrase: “by the mercies of God”
4. The content of the appeal: “that you present ...”

B. **Function**

- Primary function:

- to indicate a major transition in the text

- formula marks transition either from the end of the thanksgiving to the beginning of letter body (1 Cor 1:10; Phlm 8-9) or, as more typically happens, a transition within the body of letter (Rom 12:1;

15:30; 16:7; 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 10:1; Phil 4:2; 1 Thess 4:1; Eph 4:1)

¶

New

Paragraph

Sign

C. **Appeal Formula in Philemon**

“Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and command you to do what you ought to do, more because of love I *appeal* —I, Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus — I *appeal* to you concerning my child, to whom I gave birth in prison, Onesimus...” (vv 8-10)

Despite the more user-friendly appeal formula (used twice), Paul still implies his authority over Philemon:

- v 8: “although in Christ I could be bold and *command* you to do what you *ought to do*...”
- note also later references in the letter:

- v 14: "...in order that your good work might not be *by necessity* but by your free will"
- v 21: "Confident of your *obedience* ..."

2. Other (Non-Epistolary) Persuasive Techniques in the Letter Body

A. Pathos Appeal (v 9)

- “being such a person as Paul, but now an *old man* and prisoner of Christ Jesus”
- Paul’s reference to himself as an old man may be intended to evoke sympathy
- Paul more likely is using his old age to evoke respect and obedience
- Lev 19:32 “Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly”
- Sirach 8:6 “Insult no man when he is old”

B. Pun on Onesimus’ Name (v 11)

- text: “*Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me*”
- Pun draws attention to the change in status from Onesimus’ previous value (“useless”) to his current value (“useful”)
- Paul thus minimizes not only the financial loss that Philemon experienced by Onesimus’ absence (thereby making it easier to forgive him: explicit request) but also makes it less costly for the owner to send his slave back to Paul to help the apostle in his prison ministry (implicit request)

Onesimus = “useful”

C. Use of “Divine Passive” (v 15)

- text: “he was separated (ejcwriwsqh) from you”
- Paul employs the “divine passive,” i.e., God is the unspoken agent, to reframe the situation as being part of God’s providential plan
- Gen 50:20 “You intended to harm to me, but God intended it for good”
- Rom 8:28 “We know that God works all things for the good of those who love him”

IV. Letter Closing

The letter closing is the “Rodney Dangerfield” section of Paul’s letters: It doesn’t get any respect!

Many believe that the closings (along with the openings) are primarily conventional in nature and function merely to establish or maintain contact in contrast to the thanksgiving and body sections of the letter which deal with specific issues and thus are judged to be more important.

1. The Letter Closing: Its Form

A detailed study of Paul’s letter closings reveals that they contain several epistolary conventions, all of which exhibit a high degree of formal and structural consistency, thereby testifying to the care with which these final sections of the letter have been constructed.

The pattern of a typical Pauline letter closing is as follows:

Pauline Letter Closing

1. Peace Benediction
2. Hortatory Section
3. Greetings
 - a. 1st, 2nd, 3rd Person Types
 - b. Kiss Greeting
4. Autograph
5. Grace Benediction

2. The Letter Closing: Its Function

Jeffrey A. D. Weima:

“It [the letter closing] is a carefully constructed unit, shaped and adapted in such a way as to relate it directly to the major concerns of the letter as a whole, and so it provides important clues to understanding the key issues addressed in the body of the letter. Thus the letter closing functions a lot like the thanks-giving, but in reverse. For as the thanksgiving foreshadows and points ahead to the major concerns to be addressed in the body of the letter, so the closing serves to highlight and encapsulate the main points previously taken up in the body” (page 22)

1. The Autograph

A. Form

-term: “self” = *autos*; “writing” = *graphe* -thus refers to Paul writing himself rather than through a secretary/*amanuensis*

-not common in secular letters to refer explicitly to change of handwriting, because reader could easily see this; however, this is not possible for Paul’s letters which were read publicly in context of worship

-Rom 16:22: explicit reference to the secretary Tertius

-5x: “in my own hand”: 1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; 2 Thess 3:17; Phlm 19; Col 4:18a

B. Function

-autograph was a fixed literary custom of Greco-Roman letters to indicate commitment of author to its contents

-Paul somewhat similarly uses the autograph to add emphasis to the content of his letters: -*Gal 6:11* “See with what large letters I write to you in my own hand”

-*2 Thess 3:17* “I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters”

-*1 Cor 16:21* “I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand”

C. Autograph in Philemon (v 19)

-*text*: “I am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back —not to mention that you owe me your very self”

-*function*: the autograph, with its promise of payment, echoes in an official or legally binding manner Paul’s promise of the previous verse (v 18) to reimburse Philemon for any debts he may have as a result of Onesimus’ flight

-legal function of autograph confirmed by use of verb *ajpotivnw* commonly found in papyri as legal, technical term meaning “make compensation, pay the damages”

-additionally Paul’s presence (and thus his authority) is made more direct by means of writing in his own hand

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-parenthetical comment of v 19b: "—not to mention that you owe me your very self"

-*paraleipsis*: a rhetorical device that allows a speaker or writer to address a subject that they outwardly claim does not need to be addressed

-this rhetorical device "is here used to transform Philemon's position from creditor to debtor and so to put him under a limitless moral obligation to comply with Paul's requests" (J. M. Barclay, "Paul, Philemon and the Dilemma of Christian Slave-Ownership," *NTS* 37 [1991] 172; also Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, 74-78)

2. The Hortatory Section

A. Form

-every closing has some final command(s) or exhortation(s)

-this material is the least formally structured of all the closing conventions

-however frequently introduced by:

(1) "finally": 2 Cor 13:11; Gal 6:17; Phil 4:8)

(2) "brothers": Rom 16:17; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:8;

1 Thess 5:25; Phlm 20

B. Function

-Paul wants to issue final exhortation(s) to his readers

C. Significance in Philemon (v 20)

-text: "Yes, brother, I do wish that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ"

-v 20a: pun on Onisemus' name: verb "benefit" in Greek is from the same root as Onisemus' name: literally, "may I have some 'Onisemus' from you"

-v 20b: command to "refresh my heart" echoes his earlier description of Philemon as one who has "refreshed the hearts of the saints" (v 7b) and his description of Onesimus as one "who is my very heart" (v 12b)

3. The Confidence Formula

A. John White, *The Body of the Letter* (Missoula: Scholars, 1972) 104-106

-proposed 4 standard elements:

- (1) Emphatic use of first person pronoun "I" (ejgwv)
- (2) Perfect form of verb expressing confidence (pevpoiqa)
- (3) Reason(s) why speaker is confident
- (4) Content of what speaker is confident about

3. The Confidence Formula

B. Stanley N. Olson, "Epistolary Uses of Expressions of Self-Confidence," *JBL* 103 (1984) 585-597

-also his "Pauline Expressions of Confidence in His Addressees," *CBQ* 47 (1985) 282-295

-argues against fixed "formula" and for "expression of confidence"

-demonstrated parallels in papyri letters of that day, contra White who claimed formula was a Pauline invention

3. The Confidence Formula

C. Function

-formula exerts pressure on letter recipients to live up to the confidence that the speaker has in them

-Stanley Olsen: "The evidence of a variety of parallels suggest that such expressions [of confidence] are usually included to serve the persuasive purpose. Whatever the emotion behind the expression, the function is to undergird the letter's requests or admonitions by creating a sense of obligation through praise" ("Pauline Expressions of Confidence in His Addressees," *CBQ* 47 [1985] 289)

3. The Confidence Formula

D. Significance in Philemon (v 21)

-text: “Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask”

-Paul uses the confidence formula here in a positive fashion to exert further pressure on Philemon by praising him in advance for his expected obedience

-Stanley Olsen: “In Phlm 21 the confident of compliance functions to reinforce the appeal of the whole letter”

-confidence formula also recalls earlier material in the letter by claiming that Philemon “will do even more than I ask”

-Other examples: Gal 5:10; 2 Thess 3:4

4. The Apostolic Parousia

Robert W. Funk, “The Apostolic *Parousia*: Form and Significance,” in *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 249-268.

4. The Apostolic Parousia

A. Form

Greek *parousia* (*parousia*) has two meanings:

(1) coming/arrival

(2) presence (*para* + *ousia*) Apostolic *parousia* = “presence of an apostle” Refers to a section of the letter where *Paul attempts to make his presence more powerfully felt*

Does this by three possible means: Paul refers to ...

(1) his future visit

(2) the future visit of his emissary

(3) the act of letter writing

4. The Apostolic Parousia

B. Function

Robert Funk:

“All of these [three means] are media by which Paul makes his *apostolic authority* effective in the churches. The underlying theme is therefore the apostolic parousia— the presence of apostolic authority and power” (“Apostolic Parousia,” 249)

John L. White:

“How does he [Paul] purpose to rectify, if inadequate, or to reinforce, if right-minded, his recipients present status? By referring to one or another aspect of his apostolic authority and presence.

“New Testament Epistolary Literature in the Framework of Ancient Epistolography,” ANRW 2.1745

4. The Apostolic Parousia

C. Significance in Philemon (v 22)

Text: “And one more thing: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers”

- James D. G. Dunn: wrongly refers to this verse as a “throwaway remark” given “in the more relaxed mood of the conclusion” (pages 347, 345)

C. Significance in Philemon (v 22)

Jeffrey A. D. Weima: “In the context of the letter closing of Phlm, Paul’s statement about an upcoming visit functions as indirect threat: The apostle will be coming to the Lycus valley and see first-hand whether Philemon has obeyed his request” (“Paul’s Persuasive Prose: An Epistolary Analysis of the Letter to Philemon,” *Philemon in Perspective*, page 57)

5. The Greetings

B. Function

-to maintain or even establish Paul’s relationship with the readers

C. Significance in Philemon (vv 23-24)

-text: “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, send

you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers”

-mention of five people in closing greetings again (see cosender and multiple recipients) makes the request of the letter a public matter and so exerts further pressure on

Philemon

-modern analogy: “cc:” at bottom of letter

-mention of Epaphras first and his title is significant