

Paul's Letters

An Introduction

The background of the slide features a close-up, shallow depth-of-field photograph of wooden letter tiles. A row of five tiles in the foreground clearly spells out the word "GENRE". The tiles are light-colored wood with dark, sans-serif letters. Some tiles have small subscripts (e.g., G₂, E₁, N₁, R₁, E₁). Other tiles with letters like 'A', 'B', 'C', 'S', 'F', and 'R' are scattered in the blurred background on a wooden surface.

Biblical “Genres”

- Historical narrative
- Law
- Poetry
- Wisdom literature
- Prophecy
- Apocalyptic literature
- Letters (aka “Epistles”)

21 of the 27 “books” of the New Testament are letters!

13 of them were written by Paul!

Paul's Letters (with approximate dates)

To the churches

49-51 AD	1 Thessalonians
49-51 AD	2 Thessalonians
53-55 AD	1 Corinthians
55-56 AD	2 Corinthians
57 AD	Romans
58 AD*	Galatians
62 AD	Philippians
62 AD	Colossians
62 AD	Ephesians

To individuals (aka, "pastoral" letters)

62 AD	Philemon
62-64 AD	1 Timothy
62-64 AD	Titus
64-67 AD	2 Timothy

* Or earlier (~48 AD)



Start with the 50,000-foot view



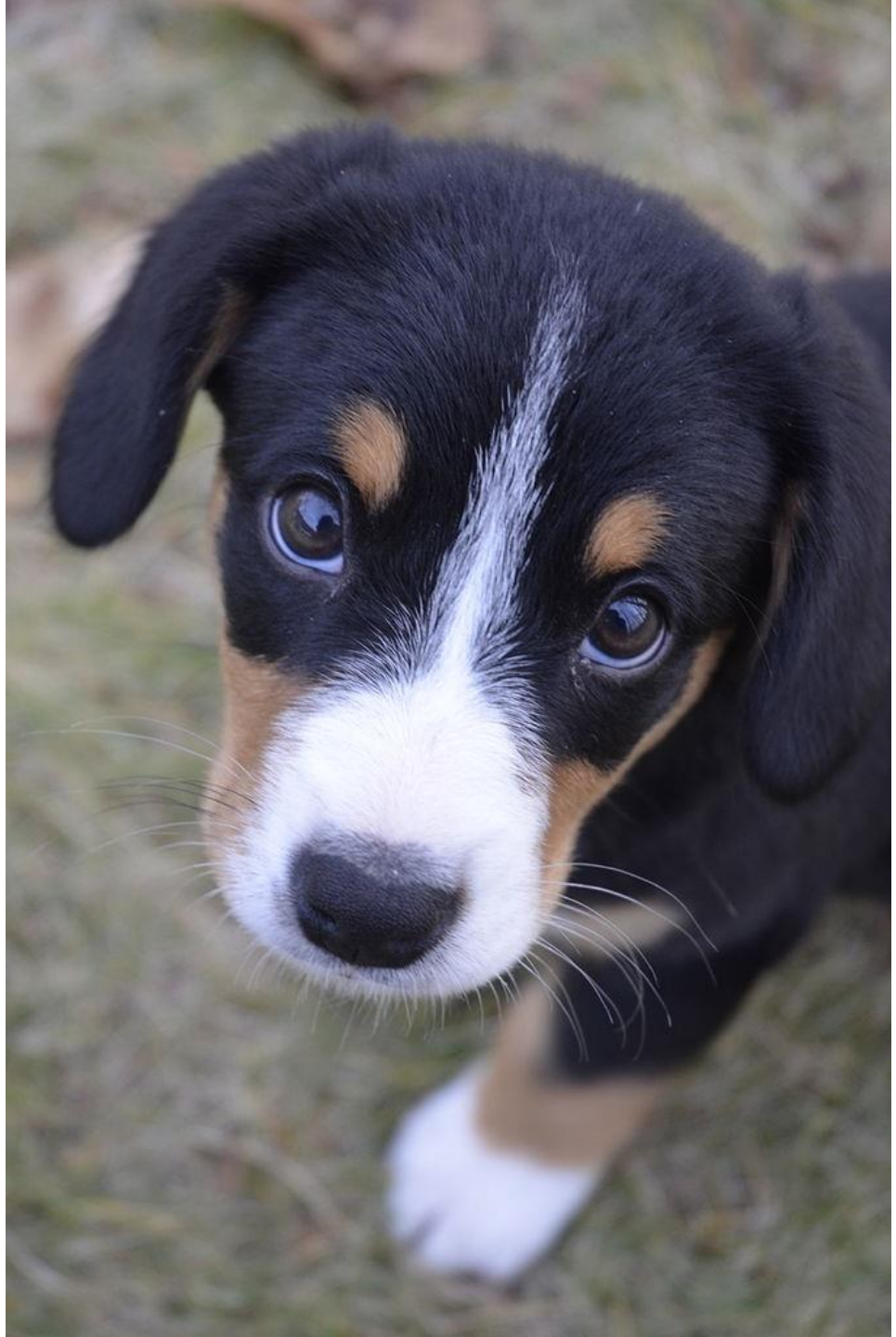
















Letters
were
intended to
be read in
the church

- **Colossians 4:16** When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part, read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.
- **1Thessalonians 5:27** I put you under oath by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

See also:

- **1Timothy 4:13** Until I come, give your attention to the **public reading**, to exhortation, and teaching.



Tips for studying a letter

1. Read the letter from start to finish in one sitting, preferably out loud! IGNORE chapter divisions!
2. Try to answer this question: Why do you think the author wrote this letter?
3. Try to notice the “tone” or emotions of the letter
4. Sketch YOUR OWN high-level outline to capture the logical flow of the letter and the interconnectedness of its parts.
5. As you begin your verse-by-verse or section-by-section study, always keep the overall message and logical flow of the letter in mind as you study



Start with the 50,000-foot view



Epistle (ἐπιστολή, epistolē) = A Letter

Particularly one with a formal structure and an intended purpose

- Opening
 - Author's name
 - Intended audience
 - Greeting or salutation
 - Prayer of thankfulness
- Body (variable; depends on purpose)
- Conclusion, which typically or sometimes includes:
 - Final thoughts or instructions
 - Greetings
 - Prayer(s)
 - Blessings or benediction
 - Autograph



Author

Audience

Greeting

Prayer

Typical openings

Philippians 1:1-3

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...

Colossians 1:1-3

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you...

Author

Audience

Greeting

Prayer

Typical opening w/additional content

Romans 1:1-8

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles in behalf of His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ: to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the world.

Each letter
was written
for an
urgent
purpose

- These letters were not written as theological or philosophical textbooks!
- The authors wrote to address specific problems or issues arising in the church at that time.
- All of Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), but God used men who were most likely unaware that they were writing Scripture!



To discover the
overarching
meaning of the
letter, we should
try to understand



The message and flow of the
letter as a whole



The author's intention or
motivation for writing



The author's tone or
emotional "force" in writing

Example – Galatians (atypical opening)

Galatians 1:1-6

Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through human agency, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), and all the brothers who are with me, **To the churches of Galatia:** Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen. **I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel...**

Why did Paul write to the Galatians?

- **The problem:** Gal 1:6-7 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel. (7) which is not another: but there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.
- **Paul's response:** Gal 1:8-9 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! (9) As we have said before, even now I say again: if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

What *emotion* does Paul display in his response?

Tracing Paul's emotional response...

- **Gal 3:1-3** **You foolish Galatians**, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? (2) This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (3) **Are you so foolish?** Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?
- **Gal 4:21-22** Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the Law? (22) For it is written...
- **Gal 4:30-31** But what does the Scripture say? “DRIVE OUT THE SLAVE WOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE SLAVE WOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN.” (31) So then, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free woman!

Tracing Paul's emotional response...

- **Gal 5:1-4** It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery! (2) Look! I, Paul, tell you that if you have yourselves circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. (3) And I testify again to every man who has himself circumcised, that he is obligated to keep the whole Law. (4) You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by the Law; you have fallen from grace!

The emotional crescendo!

- **Gal 5:7-12** You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? (8) This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. (9) A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. (10) I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear the punishment, whoever he is. (11) But as for me, brothers and sisters, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been eliminated. (12) I wish that those who are troubling you would even emasculate themselves!

This is strong language, which shows Paul's passion in writing!

Paul's summary of the solution

- **Gal 5:16-18** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. (17) For the desire of the flesh is against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, in order to keep you from doing whatever you want. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.
- **Gal 5:22-25** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (24) Now those who belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (25) If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit as well.

Closing (a bit atypical)

- **Gal 6:11-18** See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand! (12) All who want to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. (13) For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they want to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. (14) But far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (15) For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. (16) And all who will follow this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. (17) From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. (18) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.



Your Assignment:

Why did Paul write his first letter to the Thessalonians and what emotion(s) or tone does he display in his writing?