

The Pauline Epistles - What are they?

The Pauline Epistles include the collection of letters written by the apostle Paul that are part of the New Testament. They include 13 writings: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

In addition to comprising nearly one half of the New Testament's 27 books, the Pauline Epistles include many of the important theological beliefs Christians know and teach regarding salvation, Jesus, the church, and the future. A brief look at each book reveals the focus of each:

Romans: A theological treatise produced for believers in Rome in approximately 55 AD.

1 & 2 Corinthians: Two letters to new believers in Corinth to address problems within the local church.

Galatians: Written to Christians in modern-day Turkey, focused largely on the relationship between Christ and the Jewish Law.

Ephesians: Written to highlight the glory of God, speak of the way of salvation, and to address a wide variety of practical matters within the church, including spiritual warfare (chapter 6).

Philippians: A very positive letter to Christians in Philippi who had supported Paul in his missionary work.

Colossians: This short book offers a strong focus on the deity of Jesus Christ and applications for believers to live out what they believe.

1 & 2 Thessalonians: Paul spent only a short time with believers in this new church and felt the need to write two letters with basic instructions for how believers and the local church were to function.

1 & 2 Timothy: Paul's "son in the faith" Timothy received two letters from Paul shortly before his death in Rome. Filled with truth about church leadership and personal growth, these letters are some of Paul's most personal correspondence.

Titus: Also written shortly before Paul's death, this book has become known as one of the Pastoral Epistles (alongside 1 and 2 Timothy) and deals with many church leadership issues.

Philemon: The shortest of Paul's letters, Philemon focuses on asking Philemon, a Christian slave-owner, to release his runaway slave Onesimus who had become a Christian under Paul's influence.

Read more: <http://www.compellingtruth.org/Pauline-epistles.html#ixzz2tY7VZsrh>

Several non-canonical epistles claim or having been claimed to have been written by Paul. Most bible scholars reject their authenticity.

- Third Epistle to the Corinthians (canonical for a time in the Armenian Apostolic Church)
- Epistle to the Laodiceans (found in Codex Fuldensis)
- Epistle of the Corinthians to Paul (addressed to Paul, not written by him)
- Epistle to the Alexandrians

Texts also exist which, while not strictly epistles, nevertheless claim to have been written by (or about) Paul.

- Acts of Paul and Thecla
- Acts of Peter and Paul
- Apocalypse of Paul
- Coptic Apocalypse of Paul
- Prayer of the Apostle Paul
- Epistle to Seneca the Younger

The Non-Pauline Epistles.

We now come to the final eight epistles of the New Testament canon, seven of which have often been called the General or Catholic Epistles, though Hebrews has been excluded from this description. The term Catholic was used in the sense of general or universal to distinguish them from the Pauline Epistles which were addressed to churches or persons.⁷³ In their addresses (with the exception of 2 and 3 John) they were not limited to a single locality. As an illustration, James is addressed “to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad” (1:1), which is a designation for believers everywhere (likely all Jewish Christians at that early date). Then 1 Peter is addressed “to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,” a designation to believers in these various areas. The epistles of 2 and 3 John have also been included in this group even though they were addressed to specific individuals. Because of these differences, in this study these eight books are simply being called “the Non-Pauline Epistles.” It should be noted that the Pauline Epistles are titled according to their addressees, but, with the exception of Hebrews, all these epistles are titled according to the names of their authors.

In general, we may say that James and 1 Peter are ethical, calling believers to a holy walk with the Savior. Second Peter and Jude are eschatological, warning believers against the presence of false teachers and calling them to contend for the faith. Hebrews and the Epistles of John are primarily Christological and ethical, calling Christians to abide in Christ as God’s final revelation and fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant, to experience His life, and not go beyond the truth of the gospel.

These eight epistles exert an influence out of proportion to their length (less than 10 percent of the New Testament). They supplement the thirteen Pauline Epistles by offering different perspectives on the richness of Christian truth. Each of the five authors—James, Peter, John, Jude, and the author of Hebrews—has a distinctive contribution to make from his own point of view. Like the four complementary approaches to the life of Christ in the Gospels, these writers provide a sweeping portrait of the Christian life in which the total is greater than the sum of the parts. Great as Paul’s epistles are, the New Testament revelation after Acts would be severely limited by one apostolic perspective if the writings of these five men were not included.⁷⁴