

7

The Ancient Letter Genre

In the previous chapter we looked at NT books composed in a basic narrative framework: the four Gospels and Acts. Although they include large amounts of direct discourse, such as sayings, speeches, and dialogues, the Gospels and Acts mostly contain narrative materials (e.g., miracle stories and historical legends). Also, the direct discourse in these books is joined by narrative comments and summary statements that permeate each work. The epistolary literature is primarily direct discourse. Its small amount of narrative material is mostly autobiographical. Much of its hymns, sayings, and teaching material is part of a dialogue between author and reader. Both the audience and the author are generally specified in this genre. The pronouns that dominate it are characteristic of direct discourse: “I,” “we,” and “you” (sing. and pl.). Subsumed within the broader category of ancient letter are homilies and expositions. These categories are mostly practical exhortation and doctrinal expositions of

Scripture typical of Jewish homilies (e.g., 4 Maccabees; Tob 4; Wis 1–5) and early Christian sermons (e.g., Acts 13:15–43; Hebrews; 2 *Clement*).¹ Also classified under “letter” are the so-called epistles of John. This is merely a convenience, since all do not exhibit the formal characteristics of letters (e.g., 1 John has no elements of letter form).²

THE LETTER GENRE: ITS IMPORTANCE

In the NT twenty-one of the twenty-seven books are labeled letters, and both Acts and Revelation contain them (Acts 15:23–29; Rev 1:4–3:22). Despite its prevalence

1. See Stegner, “Ancient Jewish Synagogue Homily,” in Aune, *Greco-Roman Literature*, 51–70; Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation*; Schroeder, “Exhortation”; Schroeder, “Paranesis”; Koester, *Hebrews*; Witherington, *Letters and Homilies*, 20–21, 40–50.

2. See R. E. Brown, *Epistles*, 86–100; Kruse, *Letters of John*; Köstenberger, *Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 125–26.

in the NT, all twenty-one books are not complete letters, and the types we find are diverse. The letter to the Hebrews is actually a homily (or sermon), and both 2 Timothy and 2 Peter are farewell discourses with epistolary features. First Peter, Ephesians, and Jude appear to be homilies in letter form; 1 Timothy, Titus, and James are basically exhortations on worship and ethics. First John seems to be a midrash of John's Gospel, and 2 and 3 John are typical letters. Even the undisputed letters of Paul show diversity: Philemon is a combination of personal/pastoral and recommendation/official correspondence, and Romans is a long letter essay. The forms of argumentation or rhetoric used by Paul in his letters are also varied.

Basic Characteristics of Ancient Letters

The basic characteristics of the letter genre have changed little in history. Letters are a form of written communication between two parties when person-to-person contact is impossible or inappropriate. Letters presuppose a sender and addressee; everyone else is a third-party outsider. The sender's side of the dialogue dominates the letter. The addressee's conversation can be inferred but is not fully articulated until the addressee responds in written form as a sender. Letters are also occasional, written in response to some situation or set of circumstances. Something prompts the sender to write, even if it is merely the fact of physical distance. Letters are often spontaneous, written in reaction to an incident. The above observations apply to all letters, whether they are informal, personal, and private, or formal, official, and public.

Six Basic Types

From the hundreds of letters of antiquity, at least six basic letter types have been discovered.³

1. Person-to-person letters: love letters, letters of friendship, private business letters, recommendation or introduction letters between family or friends (e.g., *Letters to Friends* from Cicero, 3 John and Philemon [recommendation], papyri letters from Egypt).
2. Business letters: dealing with trade taxes, wills, land (e.g., Egyptian papyri).
3. Official letters: from political or military leaders to constituents, subser-vients, or superiors (e.g., letters from Augustus, letters of Pliny to Trajan, all of Paul's authentic letters according to Stirewalt).
4. Public letters: literary, public pleas and philosophical treatises (e.g., letters from Isocrates, Plato; "epistle," according to Deissmann).
5. Fictitious letters: these may purport to come from heaven, or be an epistolary novel or pseudonymous (letters of Hippocrates, *Letter of Aristeas*, 2 *Clement*, Revelation 2–3 [according to Deissmann]).
6. Discursive or essay-exposition of teaching letters, monographs (e.g., 2 Macc 1; *Mart. Pol.*; Romans [according to Deissmann])

3. On functional "letter" and literary "epistle," see Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*; Brown, *Introduction*, 410–12; on letter types, see Doty, *Letters*; Roetzel, *Letters*; Klauck, *Ancient Letters*; Evans, *Ancient Texts*, 287–328; on Paul's official letter style, see Stirewalt, *Paul*, chs. 2–3.

There is some overlapping of the above categories. We find personal letters of Roman officials written to friends and family. Fictitious letters include those of a novelistic type (Themistocles, Chion of Heraclea), letters purporting to come from heaven (Revelation 2–3, according to Deissmann), and pseudonymous documents or homilies written in the name of or attributed to some famous individual (*Letter of Jeremiah*, *Letter of Aristeas*, 2 Peter, 2 Clement). The contents of these subcategories vary greatly. In the New Testament, Philemon is a combination of personal/pastoral and recommendation/official correspondence. Although it has a specified sender and addressees, Romans is a lengthy letter essay or essay-letter. Ephesians, regarded by many as Deutero-Pauline, reads more as a theological treatise and literary “epistle” than a genuine letter.

Fixed Patterns

Letters of antiquity followed a basic pattern as they do today. In modern personal letters we see the following fixed forms:

- (1) Indication of place and date: Boston, MA; May 18, 2010
- (2) Name of recipient: Dear Ahmed
- (3) Apology for not writing sooner
- (4) Statement of writer’s good health and the hope that the recipient is in good health
- (5) Body
- (6) Salutation: “yours truly” with name of sender.

In ancient letters we detect the following pattern:

- (1) Opening (sender, [co-sender], addressee[s], greeting)
- (2) Thanksgiving, wish for health
- (3) Body (formal opening, background, followed by the business that occasioned the letter)
- (4) Closing (greetings, [notation of autograph], wishes for other people, final greeting, wish or prayer, sometimes a date)

Here is an example of an ancient person-to-person letter (of a son to his father) using the above fixed form:

Opening: Apion to Epimachus, his father and lord, heartiest greetings. **Thanksgiving:** First of all I pray that you are in health and continually prosper and fare well with my sister and her daughter and my brother.

Body: I thank the lord Sarapis that when I was in danger at sea he saved me. Straightway upon entering Misenum I received traveling money from Caesar, three gold pieces. And I am well. I beg you therefore, honored father, write me a few lines, first regarding your health, secondly regarding that of my brother and sister, thirdly that I may welcome respectfully your hand [writing] . . .

Closing: Greetings to Capito, to my brother and sister, to Sernilla and to my friends. I send you by Euctemon a little portrait of myself. My military name is Antonius Maximus. I pray for your good health. Athenonike Company.⁴

Paul’s letters also have elements of official correspondence (e.g., a ruler to

4. Derived from Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 179–83; Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, 9–14 (with commentary).

his constituents) that include co-senders (e.g., Timothy, Silvanus, Sosthenes), a lengthy letter body offering background for and explanation of the pertinent business to be discussed, and a closing subscription that may include an autograph notation (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:1).⁵ Paul also expands various portions and adds new features to the above person-to-person letter pattern. First, the thanksgiving section is usually expanded (e.g., Phil 1:3–11; 1 Thess 1:2–2:16). Second, pastoral or theological features are added: (a) an eschatological comment that concludes certain sections (1 Cor 1:8–9; 4:6–13; 1 Thess 3:11–13); (b) mention of travel plans (Phil 2:19–24; 1 Thess 2:17–3:13); (c) a section of parenesis or ethical exhortations (Rom 12:1–15:13; Eph 4:1–6:20; 1 Thess 4:1–5:22); and (d) a doxology or benediction is included (Rom 15:33; 16:20, 25–27; 1 Thess 5:28). With these features in view, the following outline will be presented on the basic pattern of early Christian letters.

- (1) Opening (sender, co-sender, addressees, greeting)
- (2) Thanksgiving (often with a prayer of intercession and an eschatological ending)
- (3) Body (formal opening, background, explanation of business, often mentioning travel plans and an eschatological ending)
- (4) Parenesis (ethical exhortation)

5. See Stirewalt, *Paul*, Appendix, for sample letters of official correspondence, e.g., Josephus, *Life* 216–18, 226–27; *Ant* 13.127–28; Demosthenes, *Or.* 18 (*De Corona*) 39; *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 2108 (AD 259). On the imperial letter of Claudius to the Alexandrians (with commentary), see Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, 83–101. See also our “Four Features of Official Correspondence” below.

- (5) Closing (greetings, autograph notation, doxology, benediction)

THE USE OF THE LETTER FORM BY EARLY CHRISTIANS

What type of letters were written by early Christians like the Apostle Paul? From two examples within his undisputed letters we find a diversity of types. Paul’s letter to Philemon is a personal and pastoral letter of recommendation with some aspects of official correspondence (e.g., co-sender Timothy). It does not appear to be written as an epistle for a literary public but instead to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and his house-church. Similar kinds of letters are found among the Egyptian papyri and elsewhere. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, although a genuine letter, is a letter-essay similar to the literary epistles of Epicurus, Cicero, and Plutarch.⁶ This lengthy exposition of religious teaching and ethics was probably intended to be circulated in Rome and elsewhere.

Four Features of Official Correspondence

Early Christian letters share at least four features mentioned earlier, which give them an official quality: (1) the frequent

6. The letters attributed to the third-century-BC Greek philosopher Epicurus are in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 10.35–38, 84–116, 122–35; Klauck, *Ancient Letters*, 149–55. On the letters of Roman orator and philosopher Cicero (first century BC), see Letters to Atticus and also to Quintus and Brutus, discussed in Klauck, 156–65; those of the first-century-AD Greek biographer Plutarch are in his *Moralia* 478A; 502B; 783A, see also Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, ch. 5 and his *WDNTECLR*, 162–68, 267–72; Evans, *Ancient Texts*, 298–300.

use of an amanuensis or executive secretary (Rom 16:22; 1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17); (2) the mention of co-senders or co-workers as messengers who deliver the letters (e.g., Rom 16:1–2; 1 Cor 16:10; 2 Cor 8:16–18; Phlm 10–12; Eph 6:21; Col 4:7); (3) the mention of the sender's apostolic authority, making the letter an official pronouncement (Rom 1:1, 11; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1); and (4) mention of the sender's associates, often in the opening (1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; Phlm 1). The use of secretaries (Lat. *amanuenses*) and messengers was typical with ancient letters. The presence of an amanuensis, the presence of the sender's co-worker, and the sender's apostolic authority combined to give most early Christian letters an official quality not unlike that of a ruler's correspondence to his constituents.

Eight Literary Forms

In the letters of Paul and other early Christians we find numerous literary forms, for instance:

1. *Autobiography*. These are statements about the sender's experiences and situation. In the case of Paul they refer to the travels and experiences of his apostolic ministry (2 Cor 1:8–10; 7:5; 12:1–10; Phil 1:12–14; 1 Thess 2:1–12). Some accounts also seek to defend his apostolic authority (Gal 1:11–2:14; 1 Cor 9).
2. *Apocalyptic material*. These unveilings of the end time refer to the Lord's coming, to apostolic afflictions and trials, and to other more typical features of the apocalyptic (e.g., angels, demons, the new Jerusalem, final judgment). Apocalyptic features symbolic language and may include visions, blessings, and special revelations. See, e.g., 1 Thess 4:13–5:11; 2 Thess 1:5–10; 2:1–17; 1 Cor 15:12–28; Jude; 2 Pet 2–3; Heb 1–2; Revelation; cf., Daniel, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra.
3. *Catalogues and lists*. These include the Hellenistic lists of vices and virtues (e.g., Gal 5:19–23; Col 3:5–15; cf., Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 7.92–95; Plutarch, *Mor.* 3–4), household rules (e.g., Col 3:18–4:1; Eph 5:21–6:9; Titus 2:1–10), and rules for the community (e.g., 1 Tim 2; 5; 1 Pet 2:13–3:7). Some lists are merely descriptive and lead to threats of condemnation or to a contrast with Christian behavior (Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 6:9–11). Other lists are parenetic and are utilized for teaching a moral code of behavior (Gal 5:16–24; Col 3:5–11).
4. *Catechesis*. Specific accounts of teaching on Christian holiness are found in 1 Thess 4:1–9 and 1 Pet 1:13–22. Other passages teach abstinence from evil and the pursuit of righteousness (Eph 4:22–25; Col 3:8–4:12).
5. *Confessional statements*. These brief honorific titles confessing faith in Jesus as God's agent are found in Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 11:23; and 1 Tim 3:16.
6. *Hymns*. These traditional elements are probably fragments of songs originally used in worship. There are hymns about Christ (Phil 2:2–11; Col 1:15–20; 1 Pet 2:21–24) and baptism (Romans 6; Eph 2:19–22; Titus 3:4–7), to use two examples. Hymn-like passages usually distinguish themselves

from their context by a conscious parallelism, unique vocabulary, and special grammatical features.

7. *Kerygma*. This pertains to specific preaching accounts about Christ. These accounts often refer to prophetic fulfillment accomplished by Christ, his crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation, and point to the promise of this coming with a subsequent call to repentance (e.g., Rom 1:1–3; 1 Cor 15:1–7; Gal 1:3–4; see also Acts 2:14–29; 10:36–43).
8. *Prophetic denouncements*. Like the denouncements in the Hebrew prophetic writings, prophetic denouncements in NT letters can include: (a) an introduction, (b) a statement of offense, (c) a punishment threatened, and (d) a hortatory conclusion (e.g., Gal 1: 6–9; Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 5:1–13; 2 Thess 1:5–12; cf., Amos 8:4–8; Hos 4–5; Mic 6).

Four Stylistic Features

It is no surprise that the early Christian letters are replete with the stylistic habits and thought patterns of late antiquity. This diversity of literary and stylistic features includes (1) principles of literary balance, (2) figures of speech, (3) rhetorical devices, and (4) grammatical and stylistic peculiarities.

Literary Balance

Two types of literary balance found in Hebrew poetry and Hellenistic literature are evident in early Christian letters:

regular and inverted parallelism.⁷ Regular parallelism follows the AB:A'B' pattern, where the elements of the second group are repeated in the same order as in the first. In early Christian letters, as in Hebrew poetry, regular parallelism is usually confined to smaller units and involves contrasting as well as synonymous correspondence. The following pattern from 1 Cor 9:20 is an example of synonymous parallelism:

(A) To the Jews

(B) I become as a Jew

(C) in order to win the Jews

(A') To those under the law

(B') I became as one under the law

(C') that might win those
under the law.

Here the thoughts of the first stanza (A–B–C) are repeated with different words in the second stanza (A'–B'–C'). Examples of antithetical or contrasting parallelism are found in Rom 4:25; 5:10; 1 Cor 7:29–34; 10:6–10; 2 Cor 5:13.

Inverted parallelism, or chiasm, is another principle of balance detected in early Christian letters. This introverted A–B:B'–A' pattern also occurs in Greco-Roman and other early Christian literature (e.g., Herodotus, *History*; Virgil, *Aeneid*; Luke–Acts). In Rom 2:6–11 we find the following chiastic pattern:

7. Gottwald, "Poetry, Hebrew"; Bauer, "Chiasm"; Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament*; Breck, *Shape of Biblical Language*; Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 16–17, 85–86.

- (A) God judges all (v. 6)
- (B) the righteous receive eternal life (v. 7)
- (C) the wicked receive wrath (v. 8)
- (C') the wicked experience distress (v. 9)
- (B') the good experience glory (v. 10)
- (A') God is impartial (v. 11)

Figures of Speech

The language of the early Christian letters, and human language in general, abounds with symbolic words and images.⁸ Therefore only a few examples of this nonliteral use of language will be given. We will look at the figures of comparison and contradiction, as well as at rhetorical questions and assertions.

Figures of comparison occur when familiar images are employed to clarify, highlight, or dramatize the speaker's ideas through analogy or illustration. Comparisons are drawn from family relations, the human body, sickness and death, nature, various trades, war, and athletic contests. Figures of comparison include the simile, where the comparison is expressed, and metaphor, where it is implied. Paul's use of simile can be seen in 1 Thess 2:7: "like a nurse (Gk. *trophos*) tenderly caring for her own children." Other examples are found in Rom 9:27–

29; 1 Cor 3:1; 4:13; 2 Cor 6:8–10; Gal 4:14; Phil 2:15, 22. First Peter and James also contain many similes. Metaphors carry greater semantic power. In Gal 5:1, Paul states, "do not submit again to a yoke of slavery," and employs the imagery of slave constraints (cf. Sir 33:25–26) to describe the Galatians' futile lapse into Jewish legalism. Paul also uses slave imagery positively to depict his obligatory relationship to Christ: Paul, a "slave (Gk. *doulos*) of Christ" (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10). Other metaphors used by Paul are "sowing and reaping," "fruit of the Spirit," "body of Christ," and "stumbling block." These familiar images of everyday life were effective vehicles for conveying Paul's teaching.

Figures of contradiction are irony and paradox. Irony, a statement that intends to convey its opposite meaning, occurs frequently in 2 Cor 10–13. In these chapters Paul's dialogue with the boastful charlatans of Corinth is full of irony and sarcasm in the Socratic tradition (Plato *Symp.* 175E; see also 1 Cor 4:8; 6:4; 2 Cor 5:3).

Paradox, or an apparent contradiction that may reveal some profound truth, occurs often. For Paul, the crucifixion is a foundational paradox (1 Cor 1:22–25). Paradoxical statements are also found in Rom 7:15, 19; 1 Cor 7:22; 2 Cor 4:8–11; 5:17; 6:9–10; 12:10; Phil 3:7.

Rhetorical questions require no direct answer but attract the attention of the hearer. This provocative use of interrogation was widely employed by Hellenistic philosophers like Seneca and Epictetus. Paul in Rom 6:15 asks: "What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" The answer, generally given, is self-evident, but the rhetorical device itself is

8. For further study, see Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*; Caird, *Language and Imagery*; Soulen, *Handbook*; Turner, *Style*, vol. 4 in Moulton, *Grammar*; Williams, *Paul's Metaphors*; Tate, *Interpreting the Bible*; see, e.g., Stowers on Romans 7 in Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul*, 525–38.

effective in evoking a response. Rhetorical questions occur frequently in Romans (2:3–4, 21–23; 3:1–9, 27–29; 4:1; 6:1; 9:19; 11:1) and James (2:4, 6–7, 20–21, 25; 4:1, 4, 14). Rhetorical assertions are numerous, so only a few examples will be given. Hyperbole, or exaggeration for the sake of emphasis, is found in Gal 1:8, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we preached to you, let that one be accursed!” See also Gal 4:15; 5:12. Hyperbole is used often in prophetic denunciations or judicial indictments (e.g., Matt 23; Jas 5:1–6). Assertions of understatement, called *meiosis*, are also found in Gal 5:23: “There is no law against such things,” and in Rom 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel.” Those understatements, the opposite of hyperbole, are used for emphasis or convey a certain effect. Another form of understatement is *litotes*, which affirms a fact by denying its opposite: “they make much of you, for no good purpose” (Gal 4:17). *Litotes* is also used in Acts (Acts 12:18; 19:11; 21:39). This cautious use of language was effective in courtroom rhetoric (e.g., in the case of Lysias against the thirty tyrants: Cicero, *Inv.* 2.26–27).

Rhetorical Devices

Rhetorical devices coincide with the previous category, since ancient techniques of effective speaking and persuasion employed much figurative language. First, we will examine those dialogical and rhetorical features that Paul shares with the Hellenistic diatribe, then briefly look at the types of Hellenistic oratory with which the letters of Paul coincide.

Some early Christian letters, e.g., Romans 2–11 and James 2, seem to employ

the dialogical features of the diatribe.⁹ This form of discourse and discussion probably originated in philosophical schools, where a teacher would try to expose the errors of his students and lead them into truth. It was previously thought that the diatribe was a form of Cynic propaganda for the masses, but this viewpoint only finds some support in a few sources (e.g., Bion, Dio of Prusa). Most of the primary documents for the diatribe were written by teachers of philosophical schools: e.g., Teles Bion (third century BC); Epictetus *Discourses* (first century AD); Musonius Rufus (first cent. AD); Plutarch (first cent. AD); Seneca *Moral Essays* (first century AD). Since the diatribe presupposes a student-teacher setting, it was probably not addressed to outsiders and does not contain polemics against opponents, as some scholars have previously held.

The diatribe envisions two audiences: one real and one imagined. The real audience comprises disciples of the author who are in need of further enlightenment. The imagined audience includes a fictitious dialogue partner or objector, who represents a false viewpoint. The dialogue opens with an address of indignation (apostrophe) to this imaginary interlocutor, who is usually a caricature of a proud or pretentious person and represents the false views of the real audience. A dialogical exchange follows in which the author resolves objections to his viewpoint or corrects false conclusions drawn from his line of reasoning. These objections and false conclusions are usually raised by the imaginary interlocutor. The purpose of

9. See Stowers, *The Diatribe*; Song, *Reading Romans as Diatribe*; Malherbe, “*Mē Genoito* in the Diatribe and Paul”; Jewett, *Romans*, 25–27; Aune, *WDNTECLR*, 127–29.

the dialogue is to lead the real audience into truth by exposing false thinking or behavior.

The above discussion of diatribe has significance for understanding the argumentation in Romans and James. Both contain many of its dialogical features. In Rom 1–11, for example, the dialogical style is central to the letter's message. Paul and the author of James probably used the diatribe to expose error and to lead their readers into a deeper commitment to the Christian life. It is probable that the diatribe was one of the major teaching techniques of early Christianity.

Since the NT letters are primarily written dialogues and discourses, and many are sermons in letter form, they have close affinities with Hellenistic oratory. According to the influential works on persuasion and public speaking by Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, different types of speeches are characterized by a certain arrangement.¹⁰ Political speeches and funeral orations concerned with merits and honor were called *epideictic* or demonstrative. Their function to display common virtues and values is similar to the purpose of Paul's letter to the Romans (cf. Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, and Jude). Courtroom or judicial speeches concerned with justice (accusatory or defensive) coincide well with the *apologetic* functions of Galatians 1–4 and 2 Cor 10–13. Speeches that provide advice

for future decisions were labeled *symbolic* or deliberative. First Corinthians 7–16, where Paul provides specific advice to his readers, seems to fit this category (cf. 2 Corinthians 8–9, Philemon, 1 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, and James).

The arrangement of these types of speeches falls into the basic pattern of: (a) introduction or *exordium* (e.g., Rom 1:1–15; Gal 1:6–10; Heb 1:1–4:16); (b) *propositio*, or thesis to be demonstrated (Gal 1:11–12); (c) the facts of the case, or *narratio* (Gal 1:11–2:14; Heb 5:1–6:20); (d) argumentation, called *probatio* (Gal 3:1–4:31) or *confirmatio* (Rom 1:18–15:13; Heb 7:1–10:18; and (e) closing summation, or *peroratio* (Gal 6:11–18; Rom 15:14–16:23; Heb 10:19–13:21).

Stylistic Peculiarities

The following examples of stylistic peculiarities will be examined: (a) abrupt changes in syntax and thought, (b) unclear idioms, and (c) borrowings from the Septuagint (LXX). Abrupt changes in syntax and thought occur frequently in Paul's letters. The technical term for such a sudden break is *anacoluthon* (Greek), but some of the phenomenon could be interpreted as either a parenthesis (i.e., a clause inserted into a sentence without regard for its syntax) or an interpolation (i.e., a block of inserted material by the author or a later editor).

An example of anacoluthon is found in Rom 2:15–16, where Paul is talking about the conscience of the Gentiles serving as their moral umpire before he suddenly breaks in with “on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.” The change of both thought and sentence structure is

10. On Hellenistic rhetoric and the NT, see Betz, *Galatians*; Kennedy, *Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*; and Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*; Wuellner, “Where Is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?”; Porter and Stamps, *Rhetorical Criticism*; Witherington, *New Testament Rhetoric*; Aune, *WDNTECLR*, 414–25; for rhetorical outlines of Paul's letters (disputed plus undisputed) and Hebrews, see Puskas, *Letters of Paul*.

sudden and unexpected. It may be either intentional or unintentional—either a stylistic device to arouse the reader’s attention or the result of an author’s losing his previous train of thought as a new idea is suddenly pursued. Other examples of anacolutha are 2 Cor 1:22–23; Gal 2:4–6; and a large digression in 2 Cor 6:14–7:1.

Parenthetical phrases are often noted in English translations: e.g., Rom 1:13 (“but thus far have been prevented”); 2 Cor 11:21 (“I am speaking as a fool”); 2 Pet 2:8 (entire verse). An interpolation (or gloss) is a larger insertion of material disrupting the original flow of thought. It is either the work of the author or of a later editor. In 2 Corinthians it has been argued that 6:14–7:1 is an interpolation by a later editor, because (a) there is no direct connection of 6:14–7:1 to what precedes or follows, (b) 2 Cor 6:13 and 7:2 connect smoothly without the passage, and (c) the vocabulary and conceptions are never or rarely used by Paul elsewhere (leading to the hypothesis that the section is non-Pauline). Examples of other possible interpolations are Phil 3:2–4:3 (a later polemical fragment by Paul?) and 1 Thess 2:13–16 (a post-70 denouncement of the Jews?).

Idiomatic expressions are unclear to modern readers for at least two reasons. First, they are cultural statements foreign to us. Second, the sender often assumes that intended readers are already familiar with their meanings. Remember that we are outsiders reading these ancient letters from a third-party perspective. One random example is in Gal 3:20, translated literally: “now the mediator involves more than one party, but God is one.” In v. 19 Paul speaks of the law as being ordained by angels through a mediator, but com-

mentators are unsure about what inference Paul is trying to establish in v. 20. For other examples of unclear idioms, the meanings of which are important for understanding the overall arguments, see Rom 3:7; 8:22; 1 Cor 2:16c; 15:29 (the last reference probably reflects an ancient practice).

Borrowings from the LXX are numerous in early Christian letters. Over seventy direct quotations from the Jewish Scriptures (from Greek and perhaps from Hebrew texts) are made in Paul’s letters, as the discussion on source criticism in chapter 5 pointed out. Sometimes explicit mention is made of a source (e.g., Rom 1:17; 9:29), and frequently sources are not stated (e.g., Rom 10:13; 1 Cor 2:16; 5:13; 10:26). In some places Paul’s entire discussion is permeated with a wide variety of lengthy scriptural quotations: e.g., Romans 9–11 (citing Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Deuteronomy, the Psalms, Leviticus, Exodus, Proverbs, and 1 Kings). Generally such passages are the most difficult to interpret, because the modern reader is unfamiliar with Paul’s rabbinic methods of interpreting the Jewish Scriptures.¹¹ Many of Paul’s awkward sentence constructions are also due to his use of septuagintal or Semitic phrasings (Rom 10:5–17). What has been mentioned here of Paul’s letters also applies to the non-Pauline correspondence, since all make ample use of the LXX, although the selection of passages and their interpretations are usually different.

11. Weingreen, et al., “Interpretation, History of”; M. P. Miller, “Midrash”; Ellis, *Paul’s Use of the Old Testament*; Stegner, “Rom 9:1–29—Midrash”; Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 6–35, 88–139; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, chs. 1–2, and his *Conversion of Imagination*, 25–49; Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*.