

Notes on Paulus' Open Letter

Authorship and Date:

The letter itself claims to be the work of Paulus the envoy, several times making personal references, mentioning his imprisonment, and stating by name an acquaintance of his. Therefore, the letter was either written by Paulus or was a deliberate forgery -- not merely an innocent pseudepigraphal piece.

The chief objections to Pauline authorship are as follows:

- We know of no (other) open letter that was authored by Paulus. Despite being referred to as "To the Ephesians" since the first days, the content of the letter makes no mention of anything local and refers to no local problems.
- The author has a greater affinity for gentiles than Paulus expresses in his accepted letters. At 2:3, he appears to identify himself as being a gentile.
- Commentators see a greater degree of structure and sectarianism among Christians than in Paulus' letters, pointing to a later date.
- There appears to be a more developed Christology in this letter than in Paulus' letters.
- Commentators see dependence between this letter and the genuine letters of Paulus, meaning that the collected corpus of letters was available to this letter's author.
- The vocabulary in this letter differs at points from the vocabulary that Paulus used in his (other) letters.
- His group of readers appears to be dominated by gentiles, which would not be the case until after 70 CE, and probably after 85.
- Many supporters of Pauline authorship have concocted an undocumented period after the close of Acts in order to explain it.

These objections may be answered thusly:

- Yes, this is a circular letter, serving a different purpose than Paulus' letters to groups or his letters to specific individuals. As the envoy to the gentiles, Paulus believed that a message of inclusion for gentile believers was important. He probably had several copies circulated at the same time. His second purpose was to improve the chance of gentile inclusion by making sure that there was no cause for complaint against them by the Judaizing faction.
- 2:1-10 are general statements about Christian conversion, specifically addressing Judaism. 2:11 is the beginning of his comments to gentiles alone. Since the letter is addressed primarily to gentiles, we would expect someone who became all things to all people to express his affinity for them -- just as he always expressed love toward the recipients of his letters.

- I see no structure in "the church" here, nor any degree of factiousness that isn't already found in every one of the letters to the groups.
- I disagree that there is a highly developed Christology. Instead, I believe that Paulus was being carefully inclusive in his wording. This has been misinterpreted by many groups so as to include thought that was more common later on, but the author's view of the Anointed One is consistent with Paulus'.
- The purpose of the letter was different; consequently, there is some different language. There are also great similarities in language as well.
- There are similarities between this letter and the other Pauline letters because Paulus wrote this letter.
- The letter was written before the close of Acts. A copy is found in p⁴⁶, the oldest NT manuscript of its size -- which manuscript Young Kyu Kim has dated paleographically to the late First Century. Therefore, it was clearly regarded as authentic from the earliest times. It is mentioned by Markion (who thought it was sent to Laodikeia) and in the Muratorian Canon. No commentator prior to the development of the printing press ever questioned the authenticity of the letter.

As for the date, no internal clues are given other than these: Paulus was confined; Paulus knew Tuchikos; the letter is somewhat similar to the letters to the Kolossaeans and Filippians. Due to those similarities, the letter is to be placed during Paulus' time as a prisoner under Antoninus Felix, between the time of Kolossaeans and Filippians, after his defense in Acts 22. Paulus remained a prisoner under Felix until c. 60 CE, when Porkius Festus took over. The change of powers appears nowhere in sight in this open letter, and so it was written c. 58 CE (or possibly the very end of 57), somewhat nearer the beginning of his incarceration at Caeserea. His emotions here, where they surface, are more resolute than in his second letter to Timotheos; he seems to have accepted his being a prisoner. The four letters: Kolossaeans; 2 Timotheos; this open letter; and Filippians were all written close to one another in time, with this one appearing to follow 2 Timotheos but precede Filippians. With fewer clues as to the date, however, this letter might even have followed Filippians by a few months.

Theory of Composition:

While the Open Letter addresses some of the problems with the Judaizers, it is primarily a message of openness and inclusion for gentile Christians in the region. The author did not wish for them to return to their former ways, and he had heard that some of them were beginning to do so -- possibly because of the negative impact of the Judaizers and possibly because of confusion concerning their inclusion in the covenant (q.v., the discussion in Acts 15).

The author divided the body of his letter into several segments:

- I. The Importance of the Messiah
 - A. God's Plan Centered on the Anointed One
 - B. The Centrality of the Messianic teachings
- II. Importance to Jews and Gentiles

- A. The struggle with ritual religion
 - B. Gentile struggles with Judaizers and apostasy
- III. Unity of God's people
 - A. Jews and Gentiles in God's Plan
 - B. Unity through the holy breath, leading to maturity
 - C. Unity in Love
 - 1. Precautions for Gentiles
 - a. Do not be tempted to join Priestly Judaism.
 - b. Do not be tempted to return to godlessness.
 - 2. Love in Christian Relationships
- IV. Words of Empowerment

Commentary:

((following p⁴⁶))

*Paulus, an envoy of Anointed Jesus through God's wishes
To those holy ones who are also trustworthy in Anointed Jesus.*

This was a standard introduction for the letter, indicating Paulus' calling and that his audience had also acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah. Two miniscule manuscripts, the original hand of Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, and (of course) p⁴⁶ -- together constituting the earliest and most reliable manuscript evidence -- have the reading as shown above. Later manuscripts add the words "in Ephesus," except for Markion (2nd century), whose manuscripts appear to have read "in Laodikeia."

1:2 *Hello to you, and peace from God our Father and Lord Anointed Jesus. Praiseworthy is the God and Father of our Lord Anointed Jesus, who has praised us with every spiritual praise in the heavenly places in the Anointed One, just as he chose us in him before the laying down of creation, (for us to be holy and blameless in his presence in love), having previously marked us out for sonship through Anointed Jesus for him, according to what was the delight of his wishes, to the point of our praising the glory of his generosity, with which he favored us in beloved one.*

After a brief greeting, the author immediately launched into a general discussion of God's plans. Later, he will write that this plan included both Jewish people and gentiles. For the moment, Paulus established only that Jesus, the Anointed One, was the central part of God's plan.

In his language, God's blessings (praises) have come through the Anointed One. The phrase "chose us in him" (alternatively, chose us to be in him) means this: that God had always planned to send the Messiah, even before creation began. Some commentators attempt to glean strong predestination from this phrase -- that God selects in advance who will follow him and who will not. The sort of language used only intends to indicate God's desire. Even before the act of creation, God planned to send the Anointed One and wanted people to follow his

teachings. Following the Anointed One's teachings brought sonship for the followers and delight to God. The language is typical in Jewish thought -- that when God wants something, he envisions it as though it has already happened. Elsewhere, we read sayings like this:

"Your eyes saw my substance, although I was still unformed." (Psa 139:16)

"I knew you before I formed you in the womb, and I made you holy before you were born." (Jer 1:5)

This language, similar to that also used of Jesus, does not imply literal pre-existence, nor does it indicate a lack of free will on the part of everyone involved. Instead, it was a poetic way of expressing the certainty of God's purpose and plan. Whatever happens within God's plan is what God wanted to happen. Therefore, since the readers were working for God's plan, it was what God wanted.

In him, through his blood, we have the redemption, the forgiveness of wanderings, according to the wealth of God's generosity. This generosity he made abundant for us in all wisdom and intelligence, after making known to us the secret of his wishes. He did this according to his delight, which he had previously placed in himself as a home code of the fullness of the seasons, to unite all things under a head in the Anointed One -- the things in the skies, and the things on land -- in him.

Attempting to show now how important the Anointed One has been to God's plan, Paulus indicated that forgiveness came through "his blood." Once again, was this literal? No. God had been forgiving people since time began, and as Romans 1-3 point out, God forgave people without blood. Jesus' death never signified a literal redemptive sacrifice. However, it did mark an end to a Jewish system of sacrifices. That system, God's teaching tool, had been designed so that it would teach about the importance of love and trust in everyday life, but people had mistaken the rituals as an end to themselves. They had mistakenly believed that blood sacrifices had some actual connection to forgiveness. In reality, God always forgave people through their trust in him.

Paulus went into such matters in much more detail in his letter to the Romans; at this point, he was merely summarizing things that his readers have already heard: that in reality it was not actual blood sacrifices but "the wealth of God's generosity" that saved. Errors on someone's part needn't have the sort of reminder of sin that the sacrifices had brought. Instead, there was a consciousness of forgiveness, and this came in the Anointed One.

"The secret of his wishes," here, is that all people are equal in God's sight. Many Jewish people, believing that there was an actual connection between being right with God and following a ritual religion, taught that only the people who followed the prescribed religious pattern were God's children. "The secret" is that everyone who follows God is his child (see, for example, Peter's own revelation of this fact in Acts 10). Since it had been the Messiah who had revealed this so-called secret, it was he who united everything. Paulus stretched this further, saying not merely the fact (that Jewish and gentile people were united by Jesus) but exaggerating

poetically to say that everything in the sky and on land was united in him. More realistically, this means Jews and gentiles wherever they might be. The Anointed One brought all good people together, recognizing that each of them is God's child.

In him also we were given an inheritance, since we were previously marked out according to the design of the one who is working in all things by the plan of his wishes, to the point where we exist for a praise of his glory -- we who have previously hoped in the Anointed One.

In this paragraph, as earlier, "we" refers to the envoys. Another thing that happened "in him" was the "inheritance." In the traditional language, it was their destiny to take the message to the Jewish world. "We exist," that is, the envoys exist, in order to praise God through God's message. The "secret" only showed how amazingly generous God really was!

13 *When you heard the message of the truth -- the good message of your salvation -- and after trusting in him also, you were also sealed in him to the spirit of the promise to the holy one. This is a pledge of our inheritance, to the point of the redemption of our deeds, for a praise of his glory.*

Finally, the author addressed his readers. After they had heard the good message, which summarized the Torah as a principle of love, they then trusted. After trusting, they were then sealed. The "promise to the holy one" was to bring all Yahweh worshipers (Jewish and otherwise) under a single head, the Messiah. It had been ultimately the readers' own choice as to whether to follow God, but Paul views their doing so as part of the envoys' inheritance. Good karma, in a way.

15 *On account of this, after hearing of the trust in the Lord Jesus and of the love that you have for all the holy ones, I am also not neglecting to give thanks on your behalf, making remembrance in my prayers, so that the God of our Lord Anointed Jesus -- the Father of Glory -- would give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in recognition of him. I pray that the eyes of your hearts would be enlightened to the point of your knowing what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of the glory of his inheritance in the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who trust, according to the working of the might of his strength.*

Trust and love are the keys to Christian living. Since Paulus saw these qualities as being so evident among his readers, he always remembered them and thanked God for them. His prayer was that God would grant them wisdom and that he would reveal himself to them. This refers specifically to the matters of the rest of the letter. Paulus wanted God to show them the means to be strengthened, spiritually, in the difficult times that were coming. What difficult times? A war was going to break out in the Holy Land – a war that would determine the fate of Priestly Judaism. He wanted them to be able to resist any temptation to turn away to ritual religion. Therefore, he saw it as necessary that they understand more deeply the hope, wealth, and greatness that came with the Messianic teachings. Paulus himself was about to sketch these things out for the readers of this letter.

He worked this in the Anointed One by raising him from among the dead and seating him at his right side in the heavenly places over and above every ruler and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named, not only in this age but in the future one. And "he has subjected all things under his feet" and beyond all these things has given him as a head for the assembly, which is his body, the fullness of the one who is filling all things with all things.

God had already proven that Jesus truly had been the Messiah. He had demonstrated his ultimate power, raising Jesus from the dead. Granting the Messiah full authority extended itself to the readers somewhat, for the Messianic teachings gave the readers certain power as well. Therefore, it is significant both that God subjected everything to the Messiah (the quote is from Psa 8:6) and that the Messiah is the source of the assembly. The assembly, the collection of everyone worldwide who follows Jesus' teachings, is depicted as the Messiah's body. It flows from the Messiah, who is its spiritual source, and it is ultimately connected to Jesus. As Messiah (and head, source), Jesus' teachings fill the body with everything necessary for life. In particular, they grant certain power to the Christians in the (metaphorical) body:

*2:1 And you who have been made alive are dead to your wanderings and sins, in which you once walked according to this age of creation,
according to the ruler of the authority of the air--
that spirit which is now working in the sons of unpersuasion,
among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the strong desires of our flesh,
doing what the flesh and minds wanted --
and we were by nature children of anger like the rest were also.*

Paulus then began to describe one way in which the teachings of Jesus and the readers' connection to the Messiah granted them power. The language that he used created a dichotomy between spiritual "life" and "death." This particular segment was directed toward his Jewish readers, but the writer was about to extend it to gentiles as well (v.11).

The readers had been "made alive" by Jesus' teachings; therefore, their former ways were "dead" to them. In the case of Jewish readers and proselytes, their lives had once been ruled by God's enemy, the spirit of distrust. The "sons of unpersuasion" are the Jewish people who refused to be persuaded (even by miracles) that Jesus was the Messiah. They continued to distrust God, and the Jewish readers had once been party to that distrust. "The flesh" is the physical nature, which term Paulus often uses to refer to a desire to do physical things in order to appease God. And so, he reminded his readers that the people who remained in ritual religion were following around physical things, doing whatever they *thought* was right. Even his readers had been deserving of God's anger, just as the remaining Jews were about to receive his judgment.

*But God, who is wealthy in mercy, was merciful to us on account of much love.
And we who are dead to the bodies have been made alive together to the Anointed One. You are people who have been saved by generosity. And he raised us together and seated us together in Anointed Jesus in the heavenly places, so that, in the age that is coming upon us, he might show the surpassing wealth of his generosity in kindness toward us in Anointed Jesus. For you are*

people who have been saved by the generosity, through trust. And this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift. It is not from deeds, so that no one may boast. For we are his doing, having been created in Anointed Jesus on top of good deeds, which God previously prepared so that we might walk in them.

But God showed his love toward Paulus and his readers, and they had responded. Therefore, both he and they had put away their desire for physical things.

The comment, "You are people who have been saved by generosity," is not simply an aside or parenthetical statement. The readers who had once searched for salvation through bodily activity (sacrifices, ritualistic prayers, celebration of feasts) would find no salvation if they returned there. On the contrary, they had been saved by God's generosity. God was not judging them by their adherence to a legal code; instead, he examined the love in their hearts. Because of his overwhelming generosity, God overlooks the misdeeds of those who strive to live in love and trust.

Therefore, the readers and Paulus had not lifted themselves up through a series of cleansing acts. Instead, God had raised them up together. This had happened "in Anointed Jesus" -- through the teachings of the Anointed One. Paulus then glimpsed ahead to the time after the judgment on Israel. After the First Revolt, no ritual religion would remain. On the contrary, the greatness of God's plan -- to allow people to live with him based not on religious activity but on trust and love -- would be revealed, and people would know how kind God was. In particular, they would know how kind he had been toward Paulus and his readers.

Therefore, Paulus concluded this segment of his letter by reminding them about the power of God's generosity. Their religion had prevented them from approaching God, but God was generous. He saw their trust, and he forgave. Nobody is able to say, truthfully, that God saved them because they did various things that he gave them to do. Participation in the afterlife is a gift -- one that people in general do not deserve. Every right thing that a Christian does flows from their identity. Therefore, it is not useful to be code followers but trusting, loving people. Is something similar true for those who were gentiles?

11 *So, remember that once you were physically gentiles (those who are called the foreskinned by those who are called the physical circumcision done by hand), that you were for a season without an anointed one; you were foreigners to the citizenship of Israel and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and being godless in creation.*

Next, Paulus turned his letter to the gentile readers. Whereas the Jewish people had been struggling with ritual religion, begging for the arrival of the Anointed One, the gentiles had been wandering around like strangers. They weren't looking ahead to an anointed one; they had no such concept. Paulus describes them as having been distant from God's teachings in the Torah.

It is important to note that the Jews and Judiazers are not called simply "the circumcision" here. Rather than allow them any credence to the notion that physical circumcision is the mark of God's people, Paulus extended the description to "the physical circumcision done by hand." The

true circumcision, the true mark of relationship with God, is not this physical act -- or anything physical. The Jewish people who refused to accept Jesus had only received a physical circumcision.

But now in Anointed Jesus, you who once were far away became near in the Anointed One's blood. For he is our peace: the one who made both things one and who dropped the enmity, the intervening wall of partition. He nullified the code of precepts in his flesh, so that he would create one common person from the two in him, making peace, and so that he would reconcile both of them to God in one body through the cross, with it killing the enmity. And after he came, he announced a good message of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. Because through him we have the introduction to the Father, both in one spirit.

It was the Messiah who had revealed the true, spiritual way. Jesus explained that the physical things (rituals, meetings, festivals, and even circumcision) never provided true access to God. Those were merely a physical code -- "a code of precepts in the flesh." Jesus "nullified" that code. In revealing that the true code was internal, he also revealed that the Jew and the gentile had always had the same access to God -- not through a ritual religion but through the teachings that Jesus had explained. These were teachings that anyone (gentile or Jew) could follow. In explaining that there was no distinction between Jew and gentile, the good message also offered peace between the two groups. We all have the same access to the Father.

Therefore indeed, you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow-citizens of the holy ones and members of God's household, which was constructed on the foundation of the envoys and prophets, with Jesus being its corner foundation. On this foundation every building that is firmly joined together is growing in the Lord into a new holy place. In him also you are being constructed together into God's spiritual habitation.

3:1 For this reason I, Paulus, am the Anointed Jesus' prisoner on behalf of you gentiles, if indeed you heard the home code of God's generosity that was given to me for you: he made the secret known to me by revelation, just as I wrote previously in brief. About this: you are able, as you read, to perceive my intelligence in the Anointed One's secret, which in other generations was not made known to mortals as it has been revealed now spiritually to his holy envoys and prophets.

Paulus now emphasized the fact that the gentiles no longer wander around, searching for God. Instead, they have equal citizenship with their Jewish counterparts. The "home code" here is the same one that was mentioned earlier -- that everyone who follows God is God's child, all coming from the same source: the Messiah. The gentiles are "fellow-citizens" of that single household of God -- a household that was being constructed by God's inspired representatives. The foundation for construction was not physical lineage but the teachings of Jesus the Anointed One. It was because of Jesus' teachings about love and trust that Paulus had been imprisoned, and about the reason for his incarceration the readers were clearly aware. Expecting their support, he wrote that they too were able to perceive that he was knowledgeable about Jesus' teachings, which he calls "the Anointed One's secret." Although the teachings could have been perceived, the religious world did not notice them until Jesus revealed them. Even in his day, after Jesus' departure, the truth of understanding of the

Hebrew Bible was continuing to be revealed by these inspired teachers who were Jesus' followers.

The gentiles were revealed to be heirs with me and a body with me and partakers with me of the promise in Anointed Jesus, through the good message, of which I became a servant, according to the gift of God's generosity that was given to me according to the working of his power.

Knowing that Jesus taught an approach through God from within, as opposed to a religion of rituals, the readers were able to perceive that "the secret" included the fact that "Jew" and "gentile" were just labels of physical lineage that had nothing to do (in reality) with access to God. The gentiles, too, were "heirs" along with Paulus and his fellow Jews. They too shared in God's promises. How? Because of the truth of the good message -- the message that explained the principles of trust and love. Paulus himself was recognized publically as a servant of that message, a message that he was allowed to teach because God had been generous to him.

This favor was given to ME, the least of all, to announce to the gentiles the good message of the Anointed One's unsearchable wealth, and to enlighten all people as to what is the home code of the secret that was hidden from the ages in the God that created all things. It was hidden so that God's diverse wisdom might be made known now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places, through the assembly.

God's generosity toward Paulus was probably known to most of his readers. He had once jealously persecuted God's people because he so strongly supported ritual religion. After his conversion, Saul took on a name that roughly means "Little One" -- Paulus -- and began to announce the message with which he had been sent. But he always felt himself to be the least of all of the envoys because he felt so undeserving. Yet "the secret" indicates that a relationship with God is not based on whether or not one "deserves" it. All people are equal, for God created ALL things, and so God had always extended an invitation to everyone to follow his instructions and join him.

This is according to a purpose of the ages, which he made in Anointed Jesus our Lord, in whom we have freedom of speech and introduction with persuasion, through his trust. So, I ask not to faint during my afflictions on your behalf, which are your glory.

It was also true that God had always intended to explain to all people that his invitation was not for "Jews" or "gentiles" but for anyone who wanted to follow him. His plan involved sending an Anointed One, Jesus, to explain everything when the time was right. Since Paulus and his readers knew this, they should be confident to the point of speaking freely in their relationships with God. They should be fully persuaded about God's spiritual principles, the principles that Jesus revealed. Paulus knew how important his conversion had been, since it was he who had been sent to the gentiles with the good message. Therefore, he did not beg to have his own persecution lessened; rather, he only asked God that he be given the strength to keep working hard on behalf of potential gentile converts -- people who now were like some of his readers had once been.

14 *For this reason, I bend my knees to the Father, from whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named. I do this so that he would give to you, according to the wealth of his glory, to be made mighty with power in the inner person through his breath -- after the Anointed One has dwelt in your hearts through trust and after you have been rooted and founded in love -- so that you would be fully strengthened to obtain (together with all the holy ones) knowledge of what are the width and length and height and depth -- to know even what surpasses knowledge, the Anointed One's love -- so that you would be filled with all of God's fullness!*

Once again emphasizing that "every family" (i.e., both Jewish and gentile) come from God, Paulus indicated his prayer that God would grant emotional strength to his readers. In particular, Paulus hoped that his gentile Christian readers would not be tempted to leave God either by being Judaized or by leaving the worship of Yahweh. He called upon the two great pillars of Jesus' teachings, trust and love as the basis for their strength. If the readers were to build on these, they would then come to know the love expressed and lived by Jesus far more deeply. If they were to dwell on this, they would be filled with God's very nature: love.

20 *Now to the one who, beyond all these things, is able to do abundantly more than what we ask or think of, according to the power that is working in us -- to him be glory in the assembly and in Anointed Jesus for all the generations, forever and ever. A-mein.*

The readers were feeling uncertain that God would bring the Jews and gentiles together or rescue them from persecution. Consequently, even in his prayer Paulus reminded them that Yahweh God was powerful enough in every generation to accomplish not only those things but more than they could even conceive.

4:1 *Therefore, I, the prisoner in the Lord, advise you to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called, with all humility and meekness, with longsuffering, holding up one another in love, being diligent to keep the unity of the breath in the connecting bond of peace. There is one body and one breath, just as you were called in one hope of your calling. There is one Lord, one trust, one baptism, one god and father of all things: the one who is over all things and through all things and in everything.*

Paulus' reference to his prisoner status served to remind the readers briefly that both he and they faced human opposition. Despite all opposition, though, Paulus expected himself be a good example in following God's teachings. Likewise, he urged his readers to "walk worthily of the calling." Notice that Paulus urges the relationship qualities of humility, meekness, love, and peace. His hope was that the Christian group would not divide over the Jew/gentile issue but would pull together. Both Jews and gentiles who follow Jesus' teachings are part of the one belief system. The same leader, Jesus, is their Lord. The same baptism that publicly separated Nazarene Jews from the other Jews now served to separate gentile "Christians" from Priestly Judaism. The same God is over them all.

Now to each one of us the favor was given, according to the measure of the Anointed One's gift. So it says, "After rising into a high place, he took captivity captive, giving gifts to people." Now what is, "after rising," unless it means that he also went down into the lowest part of the earth?

The one who went down, he is also the one who "rose up" over and above all of the things of the heavens, so that he would fill all things.

In the first century, while Priestly Judaism still existed, this unity among God's people was tied together not only by love but also by certain spiritual gifts. Paulus identifies these (here as in 1st Corinthians) as the different manifestations of a single gift.

Our author provides quite a bit of interpretation of the passage that he first quotes. That passage (with some of its context) reads, *With mighty chariots numbering ten thousand -- thousands of rejoicing ones -- Yahweh came down from among them in Sinai into the holy place. After rising up to the high place, you led captivity captive and received gifts among people (for also they were unpersuaded), so that you would dwell there.* (Ps 68:17-18, LXX)

The interpretive citation reasons first that God received gifts in order to give them. This is a common understanding of such passages in connection with those which state that God has no need for gifts. Next, Paulus reasoned that the God who "rose up" to the high place had risen from somewhere. That is, God had been giving out gifts not only on Mount Sinai (e.g., the Torah) but everywhere on earth (e.g., where the gentiles lived). For God lives among all of his people and sustains all of them. What were these spiritual gifts that had been given by God through the sending of the Messiah?

And indeed, he gave the envoys, and the prophets, and the good messengers, and the shepherds and teachers, for the restoration of the holy ones to the point of work of service, for the construction of the Anointed One's body, until all of us should reach the point of the unity of the faith and the recognition of God's son -- until we should reach a measure of stature of the fullness of the Anointed One, so that we would no longer be babies, being carried about by every wind of teaching (in the trickery of human beings, in craftiness) to the system of deceit.

Through Jesus, God gave spiritual guidance for the growing messianic group. This guidance took the form of certain inspired people:

"the envoys" -- these were inspired prophets sent out by Jesus to tell others that the Messiah had come and had explained the Torah;

"the prophets" -- apart from the envoys, the prophets gave warnings from God about the future destruction of Jerusalem and helped focus the others on the principles of the faith;

"the good messengers" -- these people voluntarily traveled around to share the message, accompanied by the confirming signs;

"the shepherds and teachers" -- they were guided to present godly examples to other Christians and to discern correct teachings.

All of these people had been sent during that transitional period to help the Christian world mature. Eventually, Priestly Judaism would be removed, leaving not "Jews" and "gentiles" but one group of Christians (in "the unity of the faith" and "recognition of God's son"). At that point, no one would be tempted or "tricked" into leaving Jesus' teachings in favor of ritual religion, which Paulus labels as a "system of deceit." The Judaizing "wind of teaching" --

something temporary and insubstantial -- would be removed when the temple was destroyed. Until that time, the inspired people would be both necessary and useful...to help people mature. In particular, in the face of all of the bickering, the inspired people could be looked toward for appropriate guidance -- guidance beyond that of human opinion, emotion, and prejudice.

But, being truthful in love, we should grow up into him in all things. He is the head, the Anointed One, from whom all the body is made to grow to the point of its construction in love -- being firmly joined and knit together through every supplying ligament, according to the working (in measure) of every single part.

Since God had provided assistance for the readers to become mature, the readers must realize that maturity is an important goal. They needed to follow Jesus' teachings more closely, connecting themselves firmly to the head -- the source of all nourishment for the body. They also needed to realize that the whole body (Jews and gentiles) were all linked together, even if temporarily the Jewish and gentile worlds seemed miles apart.

The gentile readers needed this advice because they saw themselves as being asked to consider themselves as part of a group that thought them to be inferior or hated them. But they weren't becoming "Jewish," *per se*; instead, they were uniting themselves with Messianics everywhere. Soon Priestly Judaism would be gone, and the perceived hatred would be revealed as unnecessary.

17 *Therefore, I say and testify this in the Lord: you are to walk no longer as the gentiles also walk, in the worthlessness of their thoughts, with their minds darkened, being alienated from the life of God on account of the ignorance that is in them because of the stupidity of their hearts. Since they are without feeling, they have given themselves over to debauchery for the working of all uncleanness, with greed.*

On the other hand, what about the ones who were tempted not to join up with Judaism but to return to their godless ways? Paulus recognized the necessity to address that issue at greater length. That way, too, was worthless and darkened. True, they were merely ignorant, but the ones who insisted on idolatry after learning about Yahweh God were being willfully ignorant. In short, they were stupid, following around their physical desires instead of pursuing the greater spiritual truths -- the relationship-building ideals of love and trust.

20 *But you did not learn the Anointed One this way. If indeed you heard him and were taught in him, just as truth is in Jesus, you are to put off the old person (according to the former conduct) which is being corrupted according to deceit's strong desires.*

But you (your minds) are to be renewed to the breath, and you are to be clothed in the new person (according to God) who was created in right and the godliness of the truth.

So, put away what is false and "speak truth, each one with his neighbor," because we are members of one another. "If angry, then don't sin." The sun should not set on your rage, nor should you give place to the accuser.

Rather than merely identify what they should not do, Paulus begins by identifying in general the things to avoid and by pointing out also the things to seek instead. In the list of examples that follows, he continues that way: avoid this, but do that instead.

The readers had learned the spiritual principles in the teachings of Jesus. They recognized the truth in these things, and so Paulus began with Truth. Instead of being "deceived" by physical desires, they should be renewed in the spiritual "truth" -- to the point of always telling the truth.

The citation, from Zech 8:16, is a reminder of the more complete passage: *"These are the things you will do: speak the truth, each one with his neighbor; within your gates render judgments that are true; and make peace. Do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, do not love any false oath, for I hate all these things."*

Paulus advised his readers to deal with one another truthfully -- to build strong relationships of trust with one another. Being truthful meant being trustworthy.

His other point meant being loving. The second quote stems from Psa 4:4, which points out a way toward peace. The psalm concludes, "In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, Yahweh, make me live in safety." In the readers' case, not only did it pay to retain anger toward someone (keep it after sundown), but also their examples of anger would allow their enemies to accuse them. Instead, they needed to follow God's principle of love. These things together comprised being clothed with their new, godly nature.

28 *The thief should steal no longer, but rather he should labor, working goodness with his hands, so that he would have something to give out to the one who has a need.*

If any were tempted to steal, they ought instead to work. And if they stole because of greed for material gain, they should realize that possessions should be shared with their fellow Christians. Instead of stealing...work and share. Sharing with others would help them grow in the realization that material goods lack spiritual value.

29 *No rotten saying should exit from your mouths, but if something is good toward the construction of what is needed, it should go forth, so that it would give a favor to those who hear. And do not make God's holy spirit sorrowful, in which you were sealed for a day of redemption.*

All bitterness and rage and anger and shouting and evil speaking should be removed from you, together with all badness. But become gentle to one another, compassionate, generous to yourselves, just as also God was generous to you in the Anointed.

In this context, a "rotten saying" refers specifically to things that were intended to provoke others to anger, tending to aggravate the division between Jews and gentiles. Instead of

provoking others to anger, or lashing out verbally in anger, they needed to express good things -- being gentle, compassionate, and generous to their fellow Christians.

Strife in Christian relationships saddens God, but to forgive others generously is a reflection of God's generosity toward you.

***5:1** Therefore, become imitators of God, like beloved children. And walk in love, just as also the Anointed One loved us and gave himself over on our behalf as an offering and sacrifice to God, for a good scent's fragrance.*

The author concluded this argument for peace by pointing to God's own example of love. Instead of attacking one another verbally or challenging one another, they ought to follow God's example of love. Jesus himself had followed God's loving example, to the point of dying in order to end the sacrificial system. Love that deep has a sweet fragrance!

***3** But no sexual sin or any uncleanness or greed should be named among you (just as it is proper for holy people), and disgracefulness, and foolish sayings or sexual joking, which are inappropriate. On the contrary, thankfulness should rather be named. For you know that no sexual sinner or unclean or greedy person (who is an idolater) will have any inheritance in God's kingdom.*

Another problem experienced by the gentile Christians involved sexual sins. Many may have been tempted to return to cultic prostitution. Paulus linked these together with greed, for both were strong desires for physical things. These things were so antithetical to what was spiritual that there should be no one among them who was living a greedy or sexually perverted lifestyle. In fact, they ought not even joke about such disgraceful and foolish things.

What ought they do instead? An accusation of thankfulness toward God would be a good thing! Instead of slipping back into an obsession with physical gratification, they ought to be thankful to be freed of such things. They should be thankful that God had granted them an inheritance (eternal life), because no one who wastes his life pursuing physical things will see God's kingdom. The pursuit of the physical is tantamount to idolatry, just as Jesus also said that "no one is able to serve two masters."

Whether to follow God's teachings or physical desires is a matter of priorities; consequently, keeping one's priorities straight was every bit as important as working on their relationships with one another.

***6** No one should deceive you with empty words. For on account of these things God's anger comes upon the sons of the unpersuaded. Therefore, do not become partakers with them. For once you were darkness, but now you are light in Yahweh; walk like children of light, examining to find what is well-pleasing to the Lord. For the fruit of light is in all goodness and right and truth.*

And don't be partners with those unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather even reprove them. For it is a disgrace even to say the things that are done by them in secret! But all things that are reproved by the light are made apparent, for all the things that are made apparent are light. So it says, "Wake up, sleeper, and rise from among the dead, and the Anointed One will shine on you."

Therefore, look accurately at how you are walking, not like unwise people but likewise ones who are buying the season for themselves, because the days are evil! On account of this, do not become unthinking, but understand what it is that the Lord wants.

And don't be drunk with wine (with which is debauchery). On the contrary, be filled spiritually, speaking to yourselves with music and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing music to the Lord with your hearts, always giving thanks on behalf of all people to God (that is, the Father) in the name of our Lord Anointed Jesus.

This concludes Paulus' comments to the gentile readers. As he returned to writing more general admonitions to all of his readers, he wanted to bring up a certain point about the possibility of the gentiles turning to Priestly Judaism.

As they left their godless ways behind, it would be futile for his gentile Christian readers to embrace the ritual religion of Priestly Judaism. This would be a return to "darkness" for them. Instead, they themselves had the ability to discern that religion does not please God. Instead, God is interested in the good things, including most especially the message of truth that Jesus brought.

All ritual religion consists of "unfruitful deeds of darkness." Instead of being tempted to participate in them, Paulus advised his readers to reprove them. Their private rituals are so much a (public) disgrace that they shouldn't even be spoken of. Instead, their lives of love and trust would be revealed by God to be "light" -- pure goodness.

Paulus has borrowed the saying from Isa 60:1, which reads, *Arise and shine, for your light has come, and Yahweh's glory has risen upon you.* In the passage, the author spoke of the restoration of Jerusalem, which reflects God's glory. For Paulus, God's glory is the Anointed One. In following Jesus' teachings, his readers reflect Jesus -- God's glorious Anointed One. Instead of merely "rising," Paulus emphasizes that his readers are abandoning their past lives; they are rising "from among the dead."

Instead of turning to ritual religion, which offers no solutions, the gentile readers should carefully examine their behavior, because behavior reflects their identity. Instead of religion (which would mean becoming "unthinking"), they should consider turning themselves completely to God, seeking always to do what is right. Putting gentile debaucheries aside, they should turn not to physical acts like literal singing but to the metaphorical music that comes from practicing the teachings of Jesus. God is pleased when he observes people loving one another; in metaphor, this is music to God's ears. They should thank God on behalf of all people (not "Jew" or "gentile"), and in following Jesus they will be made strong.

At that point, Paulus turns to re-emphasizing the teachings of Jesus about relationships. These are things that would serve to make all of his readers strong.

21 *Submit to one another in fear of the Anointed One:*

This is the key to understanding all of the relationship advice that follows. A simple principle in becoming more loving is to practice submission in your relationships. Submission doesn't mean "following someone else's commands." It means instead putting the other person's needs first. Sometimes, submission may mean NOT doing what they want, but doing instead what they need. In every Christian relationship submission needs to be practiced.

The wives should submit to their husbands as to the Lord, because man is the head of woman, as also the Anointed One is the head of the assembly. He is the savior of the body. But as the assembly submits to the Anointed One, in the same way also wives should be submissive to their husbands in everything.

The marital relationship must be characterized by mutual submission, and Paulus began here with twin justifications. First, he related *specific aspects* of the husband-wife relationship to that of Jesus and his students. Since the husbands' role was about to be spelled out in more detail, Paulus appears to have made the comparison for the husbands' sake.

The rationale here is that just as Jesus was the founder (origin, source, "head") of the assembly, Genesis also teaches that the first woman was taken from man. Therefore, Paulus reasons, a reasonable argument can be made for similarity in certain aspects of the relationship(s). Just as the assembly seeks the Anointed One's best interests (i.e., is submissive), so too every wife should put her husband's needs ahead of her own. The readers were accustomed to this sort of thing, culturally, and so Paulus barely mentioned the wife's submission; on the contrary, he focused delicately on the husband's submissive role.

25 *You husbands, love your wives just as also the Anointed One loved the assembly and gave himself up on her behalf, so that he might make her holy, after cleansing her with the bath of water (so to speak), so that he would place the assembly beside him, glorious, having no stain or blemish or anything of the sort, but so that she would be holy and spotless.*

In this way also, the husbands are bound to love their wives like their bodies. For no one ever hated his flesh. On the contrary, he nourishes and cherishes it, just as also the Anointed One nourishes and cherishes the assembly because we are members of his body.

"On account of this a man will abandon father and mother and will be united to his wife, and the two will be one in flesh." This is a great secret, but I am talking about the Anointed and of the assembly. However also, one by one, every one of you should love his wife as himself this way; now the wife should respect the husband.

By this time, the husbands who were reading the letter have bought into the argument that the relationship between wife and husband is similar in certain ways to Jesus' students' relationship to their Messiah. These verses most likely stunned them. Submission must not take place one

way in a relationship -- it works both ways. Since the readers accepted the analogy to Jesus and his assembly, Paulus turned then to the attitude of Jesus.

Jesus did not treat his students despotically. On the contrary, he loved them (and loves them today). "Love" means specifically the prioritization of another person's needs ahead of your own, and that's just what Paulus described here. A Christian husband is expected to put his wife ahead of himself to the point that her spiritual well-being is all that matters. The love that the author described here is completely sacrificial and giving. Jesus regards his students as being spotless, blameless, and holy; that's how husbands should treat their wives.

What if the male readers didn't like that part of the argument? Paulus provided additional reasoning for them. Shouldn't you treat your beloved wife at least as well as you treat your own body? Of course! Back to the analogy, how has Jesus treated his "body" (the assembly)? Once again, he has been completely giving, wholly submissive to the body's needs.

Is the body analogy valid? Paulus reasons that once they have slept together, husband and wife are "one flesh" (from Genesis 2). Therefore, they are indeed likened to a single body, and consequently, a Christian husband ought to treat his body with as much love and respect as Jesus treats his own "body," the assembly.

Having illustrated his reasoning, Paulus concluded with a final statement of mutual submission within marriage.

6:1 *You children, be submissive to your parents who are in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and your mother," which is the first precept with a promise, "so that it would become good for you, and so that you would be on the land a long time."*

4 *And you fathers, don't aggravate your children. On the contrary, nourish them in Yahweh's training and admonition.*

There were other relationships, too, wherein the Christian concept of mutual submission was viewed socially as being difficult. For example, children were often thought of as being of inferior rank to their fathers. How can they both submit? The answer lies in abandoning the notion of "rank" for one of "value".

It is clear that children should value their Christian parents, placing a priority on their welfare. Paulus referred quickly to the Decalogue (Exodus 20), wherein the principle not of obedience but "honor" toward parents is found. If Christian children honor their parents, God promises blessings for them.

For the children, Paulus did not need to go beyond what they already knew from the Torah, but convincing parents to be submissive to their children might have been more difficult. Therefore, he provided a specific direction to "nourish" children and not "aggravate" them. In other words, parents must also look after their children's best interests. They too must submit, seeking what God wants for them ("Yahweh's training").

5 You slaves, be submissive as to the Lord to those who are lords according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in simplicity of your hearts. Not with eye-service like people-pleasers, but like the Anointed's slaves, doing from the soul what God wants, being slaves with good-mindedness (as slaves to the Lord and not to people) -- knowing that what good each might do he will repaid this by Yahweh, whether a slave or a free person.

9 And you lords, do the same things toward them, leaving behind any threatening, knowing that both their and your Lord is in the heavens and that there is no personal bias with him.

A third relationship wherein mutual submission might be socially difficult to grasp was the relationship between a master and a servant or slave. Socially, slaves were expected to be obedient, but Paulus reminds them not of obedience to commands but of submission. A servant ought to serve his/her Christian lord with clear direction (simplicity, honesty). Instead of merely following orders in order to please the boss, the Christian slave ought to have his/her lord's needs at heart -- as though (s)he were actually serving God. Christian love of this nature would find its reward.

Christian lords were given a similar charge. "Do the same things" means "look to their needs" in the same way that God looks after you. The lord, then, was reminded that (s)he too has a Lord. That Lord, Yahweh God, realizes that social standing in this life is meaningless, and the Christian master would do well to remember that when (s)he considers how to treat his/her slaves.

Therefore, Paulus' opening admonition -- that all Christians must submit to one another -- has been illustrated in even the most difficult social situations. It is applicable universally in Christian relationships. Elsewhere (Phil 2), Paulus writes similarly about the necessity for putting others' needs ahead of your own.

10 Of the remaining things: empower yourselves in Yahweh and in the might of his strength. Put on God's full armor, so you will be able to stand directed at the accuser's system. Because our war is not directed at blood and flesh but at the rulers, at the authorities, at the cosmic powers of this darkness, at the spiritual things of evil.

In preparing to conclude, Paulus provided supporting words of strength for his readers, who were struggling with the matters mentioned in the letter. How would they find the fortitude to resist the Judaizers and Jews while not succumbing to the temptation to abandon God altogether? That strength would come from Yahweh God.

Putting on "God's full armor" means taking advantage of every form of strength that was available to them. The (metaphorical) armor that he was about to describe is similar to the armor of a Roman legionnaire, offering complete protection to every part of the body. Someone who donned that literal armor would be able to defend himself against physical foes. Paulus' description was in metaphor, because the readers' opponents (supporters of Priestly Judaism) were not attacking them physically but mentally and emotionally. He describes this internal struggle over ideologies as being a battle against the "powers of this darkness." Which darkness? Ritual religion and temptation, metaphorically (spiritually) the evil things that they were fighting.

13 *On account of this, take up God's full armor, so that you would be able to withstand in this evil day and to stand up after working out everything. Therefore, stand up, having your waist wrapped in truth and having put on the breastplate of Right, and having put under your feet the preparation of the good message of peace. In all of this, take up the shield of trust, with which you will be able to quench all of the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the breath, which is God's declaration,...*

God's full armor, described in this segment, was capable of sustaining Paulus' readers during that age when their enemies were attempting to lead them every which way, and they will still help people today who face the same temptations. He described the components as follows: The belt (or girdle) is **truth**. Specifically, the "truth" (here as in the accounts of Jesus' life) refers to the fact that Jesus was the Anointed One and the validity of his teachings that eradicated ritual religion. They needed to know for certain that Jesus' teachings were accurate. They needed to wrap themselves in this truth.

The breastplate, which covers both front and back (leaving holes for the arms) is that which is **right**. The term is a synonym in Greek for "**justification**". The readers' hearts would be protected if they realized that God had made them right in his sight. They needed to cling to their justified status, knowing that Priestly Judaism would be destroyed but God's spiritual people would live forever.

Their sandals were "the preparation of the good message of **peace**." As Paulus explained earlier, the good message brought by Jesus explained the equality of all human beings, bringing peace between those Jews and gentiles who would receive it. The readers' mentality needed to be one that recognized this peace. They must not challenge others but must treat others as equals. It is easy to fight others angrily, but it was necessary for the readers to stand firm with peace in mind. Knowing and feeling that they supported peace between all peoples, genders, classes, and races would give them further strength.

Their shield was **trust**, which is one of the foundational features of the belief of Jesus. The shield is a purely defensive weapon. If they trusted God to exact vengeance against their opponents in due time, they would not abandon their faith to join the enemy. Instead, they would be able to provide any retort that was called for, when their beliefs were questioned by the supporter of ritual religion (the evil one).

The **helmet of salvation** goes along with the breastplate, but it protects the head -- the mind. Paulus' readers needed to be certain that God would save them from the upcoming judgment on ritual religion. Secure in this knowledge, they would lack nothing.

The **sword of the breath** or spiritual sword is both a defensive and offensive weapon. Here it is described defensively. God's declaration to them summarized all of the things above. In particular, they ought to dwell in love -- as Paulus had been urging them to do. It was not enough to talk about love and trust; they must live these principles. Their focus could not be on what everyone else was doing, but instead on what they knew to do.

...praying spiritually in every season through all prayer and supplication, and watching for this with all diligence and supplication (about all the holy ones and on my behalf), so that I might be

given a message when opening my mouth, making the secret of the good message known with freedom of speech. On its behalf, I am an ambassador in chains, so that I might speak it freely, as it is necessary for me to speak.

Praying "spiritually" means praying to God genuinely from the heart, as opposed to going through ritual motions. The readers needed to believe wholeheartedly that God would hear them. To that end, Paulus gave them something for which to pray about which he himself had great confidence: he wanted them to pray for him. As a commissioned envoy, an "ambassador" of Jesus, Paulus had been sent to tell the good message of love and trust to gentiles everywhere. Therefore, he asked for his readers to pray that he be given opportunities to do so and the strength to speak freely. This was "necessary" for him because he had been sent out for that purpose. Paulus' directions for the readers actually helped focus them away from their day-to-day struggles and toward the broader conflict that was present in the Roman world at that time. The readers weren't the only ones facing opposition, for Paulus himself was in chains. Yet even there, he wished not to escape, or to stop being opposed, but only for the strength to continue doing what he was supposed to do. This paralleled his wish for his readers.

21 *Now so that you would know the things about me, what I am practicing, the beloved brother and trustworthy servant in the Lord, Tuchikos, will make all things known to you. I have sent him to you for this very thing, so that you would know the things about us and so that he would comfort your hearts.*

Paulus also intended to send someone around to let them know how he was faring. No doubt, Tuchikos detailed Paulus' strength in the face of sometimes-violent opposition. It would comfort them to know that he was providing an example of strength for them.

23 *Peace to the brothers, and love with trust from Father God and Lord Anointed Jesus. Favor be with all of those who love our Lord, Anointed Jesus, with incorruptibility.*

These sentences help summarize the entire letter, for Paulus lit again upon every notion that was important to his readers' emotional well-being. The writer's concluding wish for his beloved readers naturally included love and trust, but Paulus also chose to emphasize his hope that they would find peace. The last sentences, while a standard closing, also emphasized that Jesus was the Anointed One, a bit of truth for them to hang onto in their troubled time. Their favor from God was "with incorruptibility" because it would remain even after Priestly Judaism was (soon) destroyed. Those readers who were able to withstand evil for another fifteen years or so found that Paulus had been right in everything he had told them. Sadly, there were also Christians who came to hate Jewish people during that period, and animosity between the two groups only stiffened. One wonders at this point whether Paulus saw with foresight the developments of the second century, hoping against hope that they would not happen.