

# INTRODUCTORY FORMULAE IN THE BODY OF THE PAULINE LETTER

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THE formal analysis of the Greek letter, both that of the common letter tradition and of the Pauline letter, has been conducted, largely, in relation to the opening and closing parts.<sup>1</sup> The major remaining letter element, the body, has not been subjected to so formal an analysis.<sup>2</sup> My intent in this paper (which is an analysis of the formulae that introduce the body of the Pauline letter in relation to the common letter tradition), therefore, is to contribute further to the formal identification of the body. Two relevant analyses of the Pauline letter, to which I am indebted, may be reviewed at the start as an appropriate background to this study.

Paul Schubert contributed materially to the delineation of the body of the Pauline letter through his formal analysis of the "thanksgiving" period.<sup>3</sup> He observed, for example, that the thanksgiving followed regularly upon the salutation and *immediately preceded* the introduction of the body. The opening section of the body is established, consequently, by determining the close of the thanksgiving. This procedure is not entirely satisfactory, however, since Schubert had difficulty in determining the termination of the thanksgiving period. He established, with certainty, only those thanksgivings which reached an "eschatological climax," namely, in I Corinthians, Philippians, and II Thessalonians.<sup>4</sup>

Jack T. Sanders extended Schubert's analysis of the Pauline thanks-

<sup>1</sup> F. X. J. Exler examined, for example, the opening and closing formulae of the common Greek letter (*The Form of the Ancient Greek Letter: A Study in Greek Epistolography* [Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America; Washington, 1923]). Paul Wendland analyzed the corresponding elements of the Pauline Letter ("Die urchristlichen Literaturformen," *Handbuch zum NT I*, 3 [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1912], pp. 339-45).

<sup>2</sup> The body of the letter is less stereotyped than either the opening or the closing elements, since it is the message part of the letter. The less homogeneous nature of the body has been, therefore, one of the greatest hindrances to formal analysis.

The body is the remaining letter-part only in the common letter tradition. Paul includes, regularly, a parenetic section.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings* (Beihefte ZNW 20; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1939).

<sup>4</sup> Both the definition and the lineaments of the "eschatological climax" are presented by Schubert on pp. 4 ff.

giving, especially in respect to the point of termination, and proceeded to analyze a formula employed to introduce the body of the letter.<sup>5</sup> His analysis of the introductory formula, though substantially sound, is subject to correction. The formula which he identifies formally, as rightly suggested, is employed elsewhere within the body of the Pauline letter to signal major points of transition. But he takes what are two discrete formulae in the common letter tradition (the "request" formula and the "disclosure" formula) and collapses them into one form. Further comparison of the Pauline letter with the private Greek letter enables us, in addition, to identify four other formulae which may introduce the body of the Pauline letter.<sup>6</sup>

Taking the private Greek letters of the papyri as a basis of comparison, therefore, twelve introductory formulae, falling into six formulaic categories, may be identified in the Pauline letter.<sup>7</sup> The formulae are classified (and diagrammed) according to type, with an example of the corresponding type from the papyri, on pages 94–95. They are set out in descending order of frequency.

A few preliminary remarks may be made about these formulae, before we turn to an individual analysis of their form and function. Apart from the letter to the Galatians (note that formulaic types 4, 5, and 6 in the table on pages 94–95 occur only in Galatians), three formulae are employed to introduce the body in the seven letters. Two of the three formulae, the request formula (type 2) and the joy expression (type 3), occur twice, whereas the remaining formula, the disclosure formula (type 1), is found five times. Paul preferred, apparently, to employ the disclosure formula to introduce the body of the letter, and

<sup>5</sup> Jack T. Sanders, "The Transition from Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving to Body in the Letters of the Pauline Corpus," *JBL*, 81 (1962), pp. 348–62. The same formula (though sometimes modified slightly), he notes, is utilized also at other points in the body to mark transitions in the argument or to introduce a new topic.

<sup>6</sup> A basis of comparison is established by locating, structurally, the body of the letter in Paul and in the common Greek letter. The body follows immediately upon the last item in the letter opening, both in the common Greek letter and in Paul. The possible items, and their order, in the letter opening of the private Greek letter are: salutation, health-wish, prayer formula (cf. H. Koskenniemi ["Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes," *Annales academiae scientiarum fennicae* (Helsinki, 1956)] for the analysis and definition of these items of the Greek letter). The corresponding items in Paul are the salutation and the thanksgiving. The prayer formula (appropriately designated "*προσκύνημα* formula" by Koskenniemi, pp. 139 ff.) of the common Greek letter and the thanksgiving in Paul correspond; they terminate, therefore, in their respective ways, the opening segment of the letter. The portion of the letter which immediately follows the *προσκύνημα* formula/thanksgiving is the opening of the body, and the parallel formulae, which occur in Paul and the papyri in this segment of the letter, are the formulae that introduce the body of the letter.

<sup>7</sup> Only the seven Pauline letters whose authenticity has not been challenged seriously are examined, i.e., Philemon, Galatians, Romans, I and II Corinthians, I Thessalonians, and Philippians.

it may be suggested that — unless the epistolary situation itself warranted — he used the formula whenever possible. The formulae may be taken up separately now, and in the order in which they are classified.

### 1. *The Disclosure Formula*

The transition from the opening of the letter to the introduction of the body is often executed in the private Greek letter by means of a "disclosure formula," a formulaic phrase conveying either the sender's desire or command that the addressee "know" something. I have identified five alternative forms of this formula, only two of which commonly introduce the body, namely, an abbreviated imperative form and a fuller, more polite, form. The fuller form predominates in private letters, while the imperative form is confined largely to business letters. All six examples in type 1 are of the fuller form. This form may be delineated in terms of its three principal elements: (i) the verb of disclosure, often a two-membered unit consisting of a verb of desiring (*θέλω* or *βούλομαι*) in the first person indicative, and the verb of knowing (*γινώσκω*) in the infinitive form; (ii) the vocative of address (*ἀδελφοί*, "brothers," in the five examples from Paul); and (iii) the subject to be disclosed introduced by *ὅτι*.

### 2. *The Request Formula*

A number of the papyri are classified as "petitions," i.e., written pleas of redress addressed to public officials. They contain, uniformly, two major elements, a background section and a request period.<sup>8</sup> The background section precedes, and in it the circumstances necessitating the petition are delineated. This same two-fold model, i.e., background and request proper, holds for requests in private letters, except that the background portion does not always precede. When it does precede, it is often introduced by an *ἐπεὶ* (or *ἐπειδή*) clause. And when it appears to be omitted, the subject matter that had to be delineated in the background is expressed subsequently by *ὅτι*, *ὅπως*, or *γάρ* clauses.<sup>9</sup> The formal items (see type 2 on the chart) are: (i) the introduction of the request period with an appropriate conjunction (*διὸ* here); (ii) a verb of request (*παρακαλῶ* in these examples); (iii) the vocative; and (iv) the content of the request introduced by various means (*περὶ*, *ὅτι*, and the aorist infinitive here), but most often by the *ὅτι* clause of purpose. The background item precedes in Philemon but follows in I Corinthians.

<sup>8</sup> See the author's unpublished M.A. thesis, "The Form and Structure of the Official Petition," Vanderbilt University, 1968.

<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Chan Hie Kim, a former colleague, for the insight that the background segment of requests may be introduced subsequently.

OPENING FORMULAE IN THE BODY OF THE PAULINE LETTER:  
CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO TYPE, WITH AN EXAMPLE OF THE CORRESPONDING  
TYPE IN THE PAPYRI, AND SET OUT IN DESCENDING ORDER OF FREQUENCY.

1. Disclosure Formula<sup>a</sup>

	i	ii	iii
Gal 1:11	γνωρίζω γὰρ ὑμῖν	ἀδελφοί,	... ὅτι...
Rom 1:13	οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν,	ἀδελφοί,	ὅτι...
I Thess 2:1	Αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἴδατε,	ἀδελφοί,	... ὅτι...
Phil 1:12	Γινώσκειν δὲ ὑμᾶς βούλομαι,	ἀδελφοί,	ὅτι...
II Cor 1:8	οὐ γὰρ θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν,	ἀδελφοί,	..., ὅτι...
P. Giss. 11:4	γινώσκειν σε θέλω		ὅτι... (A.D. 118)

2. Request Formula<sup>b</sup>

	i	ii	iii	iv
Philemon 8 ff.	Διό,	... παρακαλῶ... ... παρακαλῶ σε		
I Cor 1:10		Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς,	ἀδελφοί,...	ἵνα...
P. Giss. 17:7 ff.		παρακαλῶ σε,	κύριε,...	πέμψαι ἐφ' ἡμᾶς (ii cent. A.D.)

3. Joy Expression<sup>c</sup>

	i	ii	iii	iv	v
Philemon 7	χαρὰν γὰρ πολλήν ἔσχω,	(πολλήν)		ὅτι...	ἀδελφέ.
Phil 4:10	Ἐχάρην δὲ ἐν κυρίῳ	μεγάλως		ὅτι...	
P. Giss. 21:3 f.	λίαν ἐχάρην	(λίαν)	ἀκούσασα	ὅτι... (ii cent. A.D.)	

4. Expression of Astonishment<sup>d</sup>

	i	ii
Gal 1:6	Θαυμάζω	ὅτι...
P. Mich. 479:4 f.	θαυμάζω	πῶς... οὐκ ἀντέγραψάς μοι... (early ii cent. A.D.)

<sup>a</sup> Additional examples: P. Mich. 6:1 (257 B.C.); P. Tebt. 764:15 ff. (185-161 B.C.); P. Oxy. 295:2 ff. (ca. A.D. 35); B.G.U. 846:5 f. (ii cent. A.D.); *Class. Phil.* 22, p. 243:4 f. (ii cent. A.D.).

<sup>b</sup> Additional examples: P. Mich. 69:2 ff. (July 3, 241/40 B.C.); Revillout, *Mélanges*, p. 295:6 f. (130 B.C.); *B.S.A.A.* 14, p. 194:7 (i cent. B.C.); P. Mich. 201, 4 ff. (A.D. 99); P. Oxy. 1215, 2 f. (ii cent. A.D.).

<sup>c</sup> Additional examples: P. Elephant. 13:2 f. (iii cent. B.C.); P. Lond. 42:7 ff. (168 B.C.); P. Lond. 43:3 f. (ii cent. B.C.); P. Mich. 483:3 ff. (Reign of Hadrian); P. Giss. 21, 3 f. (ii cent. A.D.).

<sup>d</sup> Additional examples: B.G.U. 1079:2 f. (A.D. 41); P. Mich. 209:6 ff. (ii/iii cent. A.D.); P. Cornell 52 (iii cent. A.D.).

5. Statement of Compliance<sup>e</sup>

	i	ii	iii	iv
Gal 1:9	ὡς	προειρήκαμεν, ... ,	εἰ τις... εὐαγγελι- ζεται... ,	ἀνάθεμα ἔστω.
P. Warren 14:5 ff.	καθὼς	ἐνεθειλάμεθα... ,	περὶ... ,	οἴδαμεν ὅτι... (ii cent. A.D.)

 6. Formulaic Use of Verb of Hearing or Learning<sup>f</sup>

	i	ii	iii	iv
Gal 1:13 f.			Ἦκούσατε γὰρ	τ. ἐμὴν ἀναστροφὴν... , ὅτι... ,
P. Oxy. 930:4 ff.		ἐλοιπήθην	ἐπιγνοῦσα... ,	Δ. καταπεπλευκένα αὐτόν. (ii cent. A.D.)
P. Giss. 19:3 f.	μεγάλως	ἀγωνίασα	τὰ ὄντα τ. καιροῦ φημιζόμενα	περὶ σου διὰ (ii cent. A.D.)

<sup>e</sup> Additional examples: P. Cairo Zen. 59426:3 f. (260 B.C.); P. Mich. 202, 3 ff. (A.D. 105).

<sup>f</sup> Additional examples: P.S.I. 333:1 ff. (256 B.C.); P. Giss. 17:5 ff. (ii cent. A.D.); B.G.U. 449 (ii cent. A.D.).

## 3. Joy Expression

Heikki Koskenniemi has suggested that expressions of joy are tied to the arrival of a letter, and reveal two motifs: (1) relief over the addressee's welfare; (2) the significance of the letter for the sender himself.<sup>10</sup> Such expressions, to extend Koskenniemi's observations, are veiled requests for further correspondence.

The reception of news, whether by letter or by some other means, is presupposed also in Philemon 7 as the basis of Paul's joy. But, whereas the joy expression functions as a veiled request for future correspondence in the papyri, the occasion of Paul's joy (news regarding Philemon's ability to refresh the saints) provides the basis (the "background") from which Paul makes an explicit and material request for similar aid. The joy expression in Philemon 7, therefore, functions as the background to the request, previously analyzed in type 2, in vs. 8.

Since expressions of joy usually introduce the body of the letter, the presence of such a formula in Phil 4:10 supports Robert Funk's proposal that "this may . . . be an independent letter, now truncated."<sup>11</sup>

Five formal items may appear in joy expressions: (i) either the verb χαίρω ("I rejoice") in the aorist tense (cf. Phil 4:10 and P. Giss. 21 in type 3), or the noun χάρις ("joy") in the accusative case as the object of the verb ἔχω (cf. Philemon 7 in type 3); (ii) an adverb denoting magnitude (πολλήν, μέγας, λίαν, in the examples diagrammed on page 94); (iii) either a statement regarding the arrival of a letter or a

<sup>10</sup> Koskenniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie*, pp. 75 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 272.

statement concerning something which was heard; (iv) the object which was heard, introduced by *ὅτι*; and (v) the vocative.

#### 4. *Expression of Astonishment*

The reproach for failure to write is a common means of introducing the body of the private Greek letter. The sender may state either the number of letters which he has written, and accentuate this number by contrasting it with the addressee's failure to write, or he may emphasize simply the addressee's failure. Complaints of the latter type are often introduced by the verb *θαυμάζω* ("I marvel"), accompanied by the vocative or some other form of exclamatory address. Complaints regarding failure to write function, generally, as the background to a request for a letter, i.e., the purpose of the complaints is to shame the addressee into writing.

The expression of astonishment in Gal 1:6 (introduced by *θαυμάζω*), like that of the common Greek letter, is both an expression of dissatisfaction and an intimation that communication has broken down. It does not function, however, as the background to a request for a letter. The object of Paul's dissatisfaction is not the Galatians' failure to write but their apparent rejection of the gospel.

Expressions of astonishment of this type have two formulaic items: (i) the verb of astonishment, *θαυμάζω*; (ii) the object of astonishment, usually a statement regarding the addressee's failure to write,<sup>12</sup> introduced either by *ὅτι* or *πῶς*.

#### 5. *Statement of Compliance*

The body of some Greek letters is introduced by reference to previous instruction. The sender either (a) reminds the addressee of instructions which had been given to him and are still not obeyed (letters from a superior to an inferior); or (b) he informs the addressee that he has "complied" with his instructions (letters from an inferior to a superior). The first form of the convention is employed in Gal 1:9, i.e., Paul reminds the Galatians of instructions which had been given to them on a former occasion, but instructions, on the basis of the expression of astonishment analyzed previously in 1:6 ff., which had not been obeyed.

The possible formulaic items in this convention are: (i) the introductory adverb (*ὡς*, *καθώς*, or *καθότι*); (ii) a verb of instruction (usually *ἐντέλλω*, "I command") in the past tense; (iii) the object of instruction, introduced most often by *περὶ*; and (iv) a statement concerning either the fulfilment of the instruction or an assertion regarding the sender's confidence in the addressee.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, *οὐκ ἀντέγραψάς μοι* ("You have not written to me") in P. Mich. 479:4 f. (in formulaic type 4 on page 94).

### 6. Formulaic Use of the Verb of Hearing or Learning

The verbs ἀκούω ("I hear") and ἐπιγινώσκω ("I learn") are conventional means of introducing a report in the body of the letter. The report is stated ordinarily in the first person, and the subject of the report is commonly tied to an expression of grief or anxiety. The following items may be present: (i) an adverb denoting the degree of grief (λίαν, μέγας, σφόδρα, πολλήν); (ii) either the verb λυπέω ("I grieve") or ἀγωνιάω ("I agonize") in the aorist; (iii) either the verb ἀκούω or ἐπιγινώσκω, and frequently in the participial form; and (iv) the subject of the report stated by various grammatical means.

Gal 1:13 f., unlike the usual form of the report formula, is neither stated in the first person nor is the report characterized by an expression of grief (or anxiety).

Taking the preceding analysis of the formulae that introduce the body of the letter as our cue, we may proceed to a more general analysis of this introductory portion of the body. By observing where the first introductory formula begins and where the last terminates in the body of the Pauline letters, the following may be provisionally identified as the introductory section: Philemon 7-14; Gal 1:6-14; Rom 1:13-15; I Thess 2:1-4; Phil 1:12-18; I Cor 1:10-16; and II Cor 1:8-12.

A few words are also in order regarding the *function* of this introductory section of the body. Assuming that the general purpose of the body of the letter is to impart information, the function of the opening segment is to introduce the information. And the information is introduced, both in Paul and in the private Greek letter, in such a way — either by disclosing new information or by recalling previous communication of which both parties are cognizant — that a basis of mutuality is founded. Once the matter of mutual concern has been introduced, we may assume that the relevant details are carried forward in the main argument of the body of the letter.

Finally, something should be said regarding the extension of this type of analysis to other segments of the Pauline letter. Since we may conclude from this study that Paul penned the introductory section of the body of the letter as a discrete and identifiable unit, and since the salutation, thanksgiving, closing greetings and benediction, and termination of the body<sup>33</sup> have been identified in the Pauline letter by means of their formulaic features, we may anticipate the occasion when the heart of the Pauline letter, the main argument of the body, will be investigated similarly.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Funk's delineation of the "Apostolic *Parousia*" ("The Apostolic *Parousia*: Form and Significance," *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* [ed. by W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R. R. Niebuhr; Cambridge: University Press, 1967], pp. 249-68) constitutes, for all practical purposes, the formal identification of the concluding section of the body in the Pauline letter.