

Key New Testament Epistles

Romans

Romans was written to a church Paul had not planted nor yet visited. In it, he seeks to bring about unity between Jewish and Gentile believers who evidently had some tensions between them (15:5-11). The letter provided the surest way to bring unity: the unfolding of their common salvation. It reminded them that everyone is guilty and worthy of judgment. The gospel has the power to save everyone who believes. He goes on to show the Roman Christians their common blessings in Christ.

Paul's thesis: The Gospel is the power of God for all who believe (1:16,17).

Paul's argument:

- All people stand guilty of sin before God and deserve His judgment (1:18-3:20).
- All people can be freed from the penalty of sin by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (3:21-5:11).
- All people can be freed from the power and eventually the presence of sin by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (5:12-8:39).
- The role of national Israel: God has temporarily set aside Israel as the Instrument of his plan, but he will return to them in the future (9:1-11:33).
- How salvation transforms human relationships (12:1-15:13).
- Paul's goals and plans (15:14-33).
- Greetings and epilogue (16:1-27).

Galatians

Galatians was written in the context of extreme controversy and brought from Paul a fierce denunciation of the "Judaizers" – false teachers who tried to undercut the message of grace by insisting that Gentile converts had to be circumcised to be saved. Paul argues that Christ has not only freed us from the law for justification (becoming a Christian), but also for our sanctification (spiritual growth).

Paul's thesis: God's salvation and spiritual growth are by grace apart from Law.

Paul's argument:

- The problem of a different gospel (1:1-10).
- Paul's Defends His Authority (1:11-2:10).
- Justification and Sanctification by Grace Alone (2:11-3:5).
- The Old Testament Basis of Grace & the Purpose of the Law (3:6-29).

- Grace Makes Impersonal Rituals Obsolete (4:1-20).
- Grace produces Freedom from Self (4:21-5:13).
- Living by Grace through Walking by the Spirit Resulting in Love (5:14-6:10).

Ephesians

Ephesians is a letter that circulated among the churches in the region around Ephesus (Asia Minor). Unlike letters like Galatians that are full of historical particularities, Ephesians mentions nothing about the recipients' situation. Ephesians appears to be a general summary of the essential issues of Christian thinking and ethical priorities.

Paul's thesis: God's Plan to Unite a Divided Universe in Christ

This letter is built around the concept of God's plan to unite a divided universe in Christ.

(Ephesians 1:9-10) "God's secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to his good pleasure. And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth."

Paul's argument: Paul develops his thesis by showing how God bridges the division or alienation between himself and people as well as the barriers between people and cultures.

- The People of God Have Been Given Every Blessing in Christ (1:1-3:21)
- The People of God Have Been Called To Live as a Unified Community In The Midst Of a Fractured Society (4:1-6:9)
- The People of God Have Been Charged to Wage War Against Spiritual Forces (6:12-18)

Hebrews

The author of Hebrews is not known, but the thinking and structure is reminiscent of Paul. The original readers of Hebrews were mostly Jewish Christians who were confused about the relationship between the Old and New Covenants. The writer argues that Jesus is superior to Moses and the fulfillment of all the prophets. His work on the cross has rendered the sacrificial system of priests and animal sacrifices obsolete (Heb. 8:6-13).

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priests and animal sacrifices obsolete (Heb. 8:6-13).

Argument:

- The Superiority of the Person of Jesus (1:1-4:13). He is God and man, so is superior to the prophets and superior to angels, superior to Moses. He is superior to Joshua & gives a greater rest.
- The Superiority of the Work of Jesus (4:14-10:39). He is a Better High Priest & a Better Sacrifice. His work gives us unrestricted access to the presence of God and makes the old priesthood and sacrificial system obsolete.
- Living by Faith in the Finished Work of Jesus (11:1-13:25). Again, encourage learning chapter-by-chapter and watching for literary structure.