

How to Read the Bible

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

1st John 5:13

Five types of Bible Literature:

1. **Historical Narrative**, or stories... (*Genesis through Esther, the four Gospels and Acts*)
2. **Wisdom**, or poetry... (*Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon*)
3. **Didactic**, or coaching/learning... *New Testament epistles (Romans through Hebrews)*
4. **Prophetic**... *Five major (Isaiah through Daniel) and twelve minor (Hosea through Malachi)*
5. **Apocalyptic**... *part of Daniel, part of Ezekiel and all of Revelation*

Didactic Literature:

Romans through Jude... these epistles, or letters, are literature specifically for teaching / learning about the Christian life. They are concerned with how to live out the Christian faith – what it is, and what it looks like. Any person who reads didactic literature and puts it into practice will not be a ‘Sunday-only’ Christian. These letters stress that Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship.

Nature of didactic literature:

- a) These letters were written to certain churches, specific people, or to the Christian public-at-large.
- b) They deal with specific problems and issues of the day, and do it in a timeless and universal way.
- c) They were written in the first century, so historical and cultural context is critical.

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Nature of Paul's didactic letters:

(the Pauline epistles, Romans through Hebrews, with the exceptions of James, Peter & John)

The typical pattern in Paul's letters is to write a section of doctrinal truth, followed up by a section on the practical implications of that truth. 88% of all Paul's commands occur in the second half of his letters...

- a) Doctrine, then Duty.
- b) Principle, then Practice.
- c) Right Doctrine leads to Right Living.
- d) Orthodoxy leads to ortho-praxis.

Examples: Galatians 1-4 and 5-6 Ephesians 1-3 and 4-6 Colossians 1-2 and 3-4

1. Structure of Pauline epistles:

- a) The writer identifies himself: ***Ephesians 1:1***
- b) The names of the recipient: ***Ephesians 1:1***
- c) A 'greetings' verse: ***Ephesians 1:2***
- d) A thanksgiving / prayer section: ***Ephesians 1:15-23***
- e) The 'body' of the letter: ***Ephesians 2:1 – 6:20***
- f) A final 'farewell' section: ***Ephesians 6:21-24***

2. Discover background information:

Seek to discover any historical and cultural situations of the authors and readers of the letter. Without background information, it is very easy to 'read in' things that are not really there. What did the letter mean to the readers when it was first written? ***2nd Corinthians 13:12*** (a 'holy kiss'?)

Philemon ('returning a slave to his master'?)

Don't let difficult / strange passages trip you up; there are many Bible study aids to explain these passages, such as Bible commentaries and study guides.

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3. **Analyze the Content:**

Read the letter through several times and try to outline it. This will help you understand the flow of the author's argument. Look for recurring words or themes. This will help you to identify the issues the author was trying to deal with.

4. **Identify the reason for writing the letter:**

- a) **Galatians 1:6-10** ~ you've misunderstood the basic gospel message
- b) **1 Corinthians 1:10-17** ~ divisions / squabbling in the church
- c) **Ephesians 2:12-13** ~ remember who you were, and who you are now
- d) **1 John 5:13** ~ you have eternal life in Christ
- e) **Jude 3** ~ don't be drawn away from the truth by false teachers or wrong doctrine (like in 'cults')

5. **Some examples of points 1 and 4:**

a) **Philippians:**

1a: C1V1 ...*writer identifies self* (C1V1 = chapter 1, verse 1)

1b: C1V1 ...*names the recipient*

1c: C1V2 ...*the greeting*

1d: C1V3-11 ...*thanksgiving / prayer section*

1e: C1V12 – C4V20 ...*the body of the letter*

1f: C4V21-23 ...*final greeting section*

4: C1V27-28 **Reasons for writing this letter:**

...*to warn against false teachers and to stand up strong and united in the faith...*

C1V1 – C2V18 ...*Doctrine* C2V19 – C4V23 ...*Practical*

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by words, so that no one can boast."

Ephesians 2:8-9

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5. Some examples of points 1 and 4 (continued):

b) *Ephesians*:

1a: C1V1 ...writer identifies self

1b: C1V1 ...names the recipient

1c: C1V2 ...the greeting

1d: C1V15-23 ...thanksgiving / prayer section

1e: C2V1 – C6V20 ...the body of the letter

1f: C6V21-24 ...final greeting section

4: C2V11-13 **Reasons for writing this letter:**

...to encourage the Ephesians to think of themselves in a whole new way

C1V1 – C3V21 ...Doctrine C4V1 – C6V24 ...Practical

c) *James*:

1a: C1V1 ...writer identifies self

1b: C1V1 ...names the recipient

1c: C1V1 ...the greeting

1e: C1V2 – C5V20 ...the body of the letter

4: **Reasons for writing this letter:**

...to warn believers of some habits they had fallen into that undermined the essence of what they believed, namely favoritism, slander, pride, misuse of wealth, a lack of patience, etc.

James has 'commands' throughout his book. **James** is generally considered to be the New Testament 'wisdom' book, very much like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."
2nd Timothy 3:16-17

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