

New Testament Letter Structure
by Felix Just, S.J., Ph.D.
https://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT_Letters.htm

Undisputed Epistles

Letter:	1 Thess	[2 Thess]	1 Cor	Phil (see below for partition theory)	Phlm	2 Cor (see below for partition theory)	Gal	Rom
I) Letter Beginning: Sender(s): From whom	1:1a - Paul, Silvanus , & Timothy	1:1a - Paul, Silvanus , & Timothy	1:1 - Paul an apostle, & our brother Sosthenes	1:1a - Paul & Timothy, servants of CJ	1a - Paul <i>prisoner</i> of CJ & Timothy our brother	1:1a - Paul apostle of CJ & Timothy our brother	1:1-2a - Paul an apostle of God & <i>all those with me</i>	1:1-6 - Paul a servant of JC, called to be an apostle.
Recipient(s): To whom	1:1b - to the Church of the Thessalonians in God Father & Lord JC	1:1b - to the Church of the Thessalonians in God Father & Lord JC	1:2 - Church of God in Corinth <i>and all who call on Jesus!</i>	1:1b - to all saints in CJ in Philippi, <i>with bishops & deacons</i>	1b-2 - to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, & house church	1:1b - Church of God in Corinth <i>and all saints in Achaia</i>	1:2b - to Churches of Galatia	1:7a - to all God's beloved in Rome, called to be saints
Formulaic Greeting	1:1c - Grace to you and peace	1:2 - Grace to you and peace from God Father & Lord JC	1:3 - Grace to you and peace from God Father & Lord JC	1:2 - Grace to you and peace from God Father & Lord JC	3 - Grace to you and peace from God Father & Lord JC	1:2 - Grace to you and peace from God Father & Lord JC	1:3-5 - Grace & peace from JC, <i>who gave himself for our sins.</i>	1:7b - Grace to you and peace from God Father & Lord JC
Thanksgiving (or Blessing)	1:2-10 - faith, love, & hope; & 2:13-16 - for accepting God's word	1:3-4 - faith & love growing; & 2:13-15 - God chose you for salvation	1:4-9 - grace, riches, wisdom, spiritual gifts given to strengthen you	1:3-11 - you share in the Gospel, in righteousness & love	4-7 - love, faith, sharing, joy & encouragement	1:3-11 - Blessed be the God of JC, Father of mercy & God who consoles	X [1:6-10 - "I am amazed."]	1:8-15 - faith & spiritual encouragement
II) Letter Body: Initial Exhortation	2:1-12 - follow Paul's example; 2:17-3:13 - Paul's relation to Xns in Thessalonica	[1:5-12] - God's judgement at the revelation of Jesus	1:10-17 - appeal for unity, not division in the community	1:12-30 - spread of the Gospel;	8-10 - appeal on behalf of Onesimus	1:12-2:13; 7:5-16 - on reconciliation	[1:11-2:21 - Paul's life & preaching]	X
Thesis Statement	?	?	1:18 - message of the cross: foolish or powerful?	[2:1-2 - be united in mind & love]	[11 - word-play: useless/ useful]	?	1:11-12 - Paul's Gospel is from JC; 2:15-21 - justification thru the faith of CJ	1:16-17 - gospel is the power of God for salvation thru faith
Theological Discussions	4:13-5:11 - death, resurrection & the parousia	2:1-12 - events before the coming of JC	1:19-4:21 - true wisdom in JC; [5:1-15:58 also very theological]	2:1-3:1 - unity & humility in CJ; [3:2-4:1 - against circumcision]	11-16 - freedom & brotherhood	[2:14-7:4 - Paul's role as apostle]	3:1-5:12 - the Law & Faith; Abraham; Hagar vs. Sarah	1:18-11:36 - law, sin, faith; Adam, Abraham, Jesus; baptism, death, life
Ethical Admonitions	4:1-12 - live God's will; love one another; 5:12-22 - life in community	3:6-15 - warnings against idleness & disobedience	5:1-15:58 - about the Corinthians' problems & questions	4:2-9 - Euodia & Syntyche; Rejoice always	17-21 - repaying debts; obedience	[10:1-13:10 - warnings against false apostles]	5:13-6:10 - lots of warnings; bear others' burdens	12:1-15:21 - life in the body of Christ; mutual love
III) Letter Conclusion: Practical Matters	5:25 - pray for us	3:1-5 - request for prayers	16:1-14 - the collection, travel plans, warnings	4:10-20 - thanks for gifts sent through Ephroditus	22 - prepare a guest room	[8:1-24; 9:1-15 - help the poor] 13:1-10 - Paul's third visit	X	15:22-33 - travel plans; 16:17-20 - be careful of evil
Individual Greetings	5:26 - Greet all brothers & sisters	X	16:15-18 - commending Stephanas.; 19-20 - from Asia greetings	4:21-22 - greet saints in CJ; all saints greet you, esp. Caesar's house	23-24 - greetings from five companions (cf. Col 4:10)	13:11-12 - greet one another with holy kiss; all the saints greet you	X	16:1-16, 21-23 - lots of greetings to Rome & from Corinth
Personal Postscript	X	3:17-18 - Paul marks every letter this way	16:21-24 - a curse on those who don't love the Lord	X	19 - I, Paul, write this with my own hand, I will repay	X	6:11-17 - more warnings re. circumcision & the cross	X [16:22 - by scribe Tertius]
Prayer or Doxology	[3:11-13] 5:23-24 - May God sanctify you; & 5:28 - Grace of JC be with you.	[2:16-17] 3:5, 16, 18 - May the Lord give you love peace & grace	16:23-24 - grace of Lord Jesus & my love be with you in Christ	4:20 - to God be glory; 4:23 - grace of the Lord JC be with your spirit	25 - grace of Lord JC be with your spirit.	13:13 - grace of Lord JC, love of God, & communion of HS with all	6:18 - grace of Lord JC be with your spirit. Amen.	[11:33-36] [15:13] 16:25-27 - to God be glory
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Six Disputed Epistles

Letter:	2 Thess	Col	Eph	1 Tim	2 Tim	Titus	[Hebrews]
I) Letter Beginning: Sender(s): From whom	1:1a - Paul, Silvanus , & Timothy	1:1 - Paul, apostle of CJ, and Timothy our brother	1:1a - Paul, apostle of CJ by the will of God	1:1 - Paul, apostle of CJ by command of God and CJ	1:1 - Paul, apostle of CJ by will of God, for life in CJ	1:1-3 - Paul, slave of God & apostle of JC...	X
Recipient(s): To whom	1:1b - to Church of Thessalonians in God Father & Lord JC	1:2a - to saints & faithful in Christ in Colossae	1:1b - to saints in Ephesus, faithful in CJ	1:2a - to Timothy, my loyal child in the faith	1:2a - to Timothy, my beloved child	1:4a - to Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share	X
Formulaic Greeting	1:2 - Grace to you & peace from God Father & Lord JC	1:2b - Grace to you & peace from God Father	1:2 - Grace to you & peace from God Father & Lord JC	1:2b - Grace, mercy & peace from God Father & CJ Lord	1:2b - Grace, mercy & peace from God Father & CJ Lord	1:4b - Grace & peace from God Father & CJ Savior	X
Thanksgiving (or Blessing)	1:3-4 - for faith & love growing; & 2:13-15 - God chose you for salvation	1:3-8 - for faith, love, hope; Gospel is bearing fruit	1:3-14 - Blessed be God & Father of our Lord JC...; & 1:15-23 - prayer of thanks	X	1:3-7 - for your sincere faith; rekindle God's gifts	X	X
II) Letter Body: Initial Exhortation	[1:5-12] - God's judgement at the revelation of Jesus	1:9-14 - prayer for knowledge, wisdom, strength	[1:15-23 - in prayer form]	1:3-20 - remain in Ephesus to preserve true doctrines	1:8-18 - do not be ashamed of serving the Gospel	1:5-16 - put the churches on Crete in order	X
Thesis Statement	?	[1:15-20 - Hymn to Christ]	[1:20-23 - God's power in Christ]	X	X	X	1:1-4 - God has spoken thru his Son
Theological Discussions	2:1-12 - events before the coming of JC	1:15-2:23 - salvation in Christ, not thru philosophy	2:1-3:21 - life in CJ for the Gentiles	[2:1-6:19 - some theology mixed in]	2:1-3:9 - faith vs. godlessness	X	most of 1:5-11:40 - Jesus, the great high priest, surpasses all
Ethical Admonitions	3:6-15 - warning against being idle	3:1-4:6 - life in Christ; rules for Xn households	4:1-6:20 - unity in the body of Christ; household code	2:1-6:19 - rules for church leaders & community conduct	3:10-4:8 - follow Paul's example of faith & suffering	2:1-3:11 - teach sound doctrine & good works	2:1-4; 3:7-4:16; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; esp. 12:1-13:19
III) Letter Conclusion: Practical Matters	3:6-15 - warn against being idle	4:7-9 - Tychicus & Onesimus sent; 4:16 - exchange letters w/ Laodicea	6:21-22 - sending Tychicus, faithful minister	X	4:9-18 - come soon; bring cloak, books & writings; beware of opponents	3:12-14 - support the missionaries; come soon	13:23 - Timothy has been freed
Individual Greetings	X	4:10-17 - from & to many people (cf. Phlm 23)	6:23 - peace to the whole community	[6:20-21a - final admonition]	4:19-21 - greet Prisca, Aquila, etc.; four others greet him	3:15a - all here greet you; greet those who love us	13:24 - greet all the leaders & saints;
Personal Postscript	3:17-18 - Paul marks every letter this way	4:18a - remember my chains	X	X	X	X	[13:22 - bear with my exhortation]
Prayer or Doxology	3:5, 16, 18 - May the Lord give you love peace & grace	4:18b - grace be with you	6:24 - grace to all who have undying love for our Lord JC	6:21b - grace be with you	4:22 - Lord be with your spirit; grace be with you	3:15b - grace be with all of you	13:20-21, 25 - may God of peace make you complete; grace be with all of you
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