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I. OPENING GREETING (1:1-2)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, 2 To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

According to ancient literary conventions, all of Paul’s writings qualify as letters. But the “letter” category in antiquity was a broad one, containing writings of various degrees of formality and intimacy and a range of purposes. Paul’s letters are not all identical in terms of genre and function; they tend rather to vary with the situations and recipients addressed. But they do share the basic social intention of the letter, which was — as a stand-in for oral communication that distance or social status (protocol) prohibited — to engage the recipient(s) in a conversation, dialogue, or some other act of communication.¹

The only essential formal feature of a letter was the greeting. Typically it identifies the sender and the recipient and adds a salutation. A glance at Paul’s letters shows how flexible the greeting might be; in fact, Titus 1:1-4 represents one of the most extensive Pauline greetings (cf. Rom 1:1-7). Variations often reflect directions in which Paul will move as the letter unfolds, as well as the tone he desires to adopt with the readers (see discussion at Titus 1:1-4). Thus the greeting in Galatians is heavy on the origin of Paul’s apostolic office, while in Philippians the greeting strikes a different note by passing over this topic altogether. And each of these letters develops according to the lead given in the greeting.

THE FIRST LETTER TO TIMOTHY

More than just opening the conversation, the greeting also establishes the social context for the communication. Just as in oral communication, two parties will address one another according to rules of social status and degrees of relationship, so in the written substitute the greeting sets that stage, identifying the relative positions of the sender and the recipient.\(^2\) In the case of 1 Timothy (and 2 Timothy and Titus), the reality of the literary situation continues to be debated. But whether the relationship between the sender and the recipient was fictional or actual, it was meant to be understood as if it were really Paul and really Timothy engaged in this exchange.

Apart from prior assumptions, there is nothing in the greeting to indicate other than a real instance of written communication between Paul and Timothy. Yet the mixture of materials to follow in the letter — some private, for Timothy; some public, for the church — has suggested to some that “Timothy” must be some sort of fictive paradigm or literary device through which teaching for the church and its leadership could be conveyed authoritatively. As we noted in the Introduction (31), among other features this tendency to alternate between private and public instruction has an analogue in a type of Hellenistic diplomatic document called the *mandata principis* (mandates of the ruler). Essentially a memorandum, the document from a ruler or government official set out instructions for his posted delegate (duties and obligations) and addressed the receiving community’s responsibilities both to the ruler and his delegate. 1 Timothy represents a letter in which this genre feature has been incorporated. Consequently, both the direct second-person address and the wider public discourse of the letter should be taken at face value.

A. THE WRITER

Paul’s first task in the greeting is to identify himself. He does this by stating his name and his office, and explaining something about the basis of his office. We begin with Paul’s name. While there is by no means complete uniformity in the greetings of Paul’s letters,\(^3\) all of them begin with the name “Paul,” identifying the writer as the converted Pharisee and apostle of the Gentiles.\(^4\) Notably, Paul identifies only himself as the author of this letter and


\(^3\) For the self-designation “apostle,” cf. Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Titus 1:1. 1 and 2 Thessalonians lack a self-designation. Romans, Philippians and Titus use the term “slave” to define Paul’s relationship to Christ (see discussion at Titus 1:1).

\(^4\) As the beginning of each of the Pauline letters indicates, the apostle typically

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1:1-2  The Writer

gives no indication of additional co-sponsorship, a situation that may apply otherwise only to Romans and Ephesians.\(^5\) Rather than see this as a sign that the letter is a forgery that seeks to exalt Paul,\(^6\) interpreters have little cause to set aside the possibility that this letter is one of those that, for whatever reasons, was written (or sent) solely by the apostle himself.

Paul next designates himself “apostle of Christ Jesus.”\(^7\) In doing so, he signals primarily that the letter with its teaching falls under the category of apostolic authority. “Apostle” in its most technical usage in the NT describes one who had seen the risen Lord and was appointed by him to preach the gospel. While the term also identified some who had been appointed to carry out specific tasks by the churches (Phil 2:25), it is the first sense that applies to Paul (cf. Galatians 1).\(^8\) His status is therefore that of an authoritative leader, one to whom a divine commission has been given. Paul, his coworkers, and those in his churches would have known well the event that marked this calling to office (Acts 9:1-19 pars.; Gal 1:15-16) and indeed the specific Gentile directions in which this calling took him (1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11). This history conferred on Paul the obligation and right to adjudicate, as Christ’s “sent one,” in all matters of church life. The note of authority was presumably not vitally necessary for Timothy to understand his own subordinate status, but as in all of Paul's letters, in this case matters to be addressed in Ephesus by Paul’s delegate — corrections to be instituted, discipline to be meted out, leaders to be chosen — carried more force with apostolic weight behind them. It would be critical that the Ephesian believers recognize not only that Timothy was accountable to Paul but also that they were accountable to Timothy as the apostle’s authorized delegate in the church.

The association of Paul’s apostolate with “Christ Jesus” is standard for Paul.\(^9\) The genitive relationship indicates the source of his commission


5. Timothy is named as co-sender in 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; Phlm 1; Silas and Timothy in 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Sosthenes in 1 Cor 1:1; and unnamed colleagues occupy this position in Gal 1:2. See the discussion in Prior, Paul the Letter-Writer, 37-50; Johnson, Writings, 254; Marshall, 355.


7. For the order of names, “Christ Jesus,” see 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; Phlm 1 (cf. Eph 1:1, where the textual evidence is split).


9. Gk. ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ; see 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1;
THE FIRST LETTER TO TIMOTHY

and authority (Gal 1:12) and the fact that he is sent to proclaim the gospel (= "Christ Jesus"; cf. 1 Cor 1:23). 10

Thirdly, Paul sets out the basis or origin of his calling to be an apostle. In doing so, he identifies the action of God and Christ that lies behind his calling but also introduces a key element in the theology and Christology of this letter. In the prepositional phrase "by the command of God . . . and of Christ Jesus . . ." (cf. Titus 1:1), Paul defines his calling in terms of divine "command." 11 The thought differs slightly from that expressed in the phrase "by the will of God" in 2 Tim 1:1. In the present passage, "command" focuses on the active outworking or expression of the divine will, and God and Christ are co-participants in this act. In the alternative phrase ("by the will of God") it is God's will alone that determines Paul's ministry. The decision to bring out the more active perspective on the event lies, almost certainly, in the upcoming allusion to Paul's calling to be an apostle and Christ's revelatory role in that episode (1:11-16).

In this reference to God, Paul introduces a striking theological theme with christological implications. For the first of three times in this letter, God is called "Savior" (2:3; 4:10). 12 "Savior" had already become a well-known appellation of Yahweh in the Greek OT, 13 where the exodus was the archetypal salvation event. In NT usage, "savior" depicted God as saving the

2 Tim 1:1. Titus 1:1 reverses the order of names (cf. the variant in Eph 1:1). See further the note on 1 Tim 1:2. In 1 Timothy the order of names, "Christ Jesus," occurs far more frequently (12x) than "Jesus Christ" (2x); however, the two minority occurrences (6:3, 14) each have the name in collocation with the phrase "our Lord" according to the overwhelming preponderance of instances of this collocation in earlier Pauline writings (40+ occurrences; Paul's only true variation is Phil 3:8; for the rest, the order "Christ Jesus" occurs with "our Lord" only when the name is governed by the preposition ev; Rom 6:23; 8:38; 1 Cor 4:17; 15:31; Eph 3:11; Col 2:6; in view of this, the configuration in 1 Tim 1:2, which combines "Christ Jesus" with "our Lord" [Χριστὸς Ισαακοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ ημῶν], belongs to the category of Phil 3:8). 10

Marshall, 354.

11. Gk. κατ᾽ ἐπιταγήν; ἐπιταγή ("command, directive, order") is Pauline in the NT, used of the commands issued by the apostle and his coworkers (1 Cor 7:6, 25; 2 Cor 8:8; Titus 2:15) and, as here, in relation to Paul's calling to preach (Rom 16:26). Elsewhere the term is used of divine (Psalms of Solomon 18:12; Wis 18:15; 19:6; for the exact combination κατ᾽ ἐπιταγή, used of Zeus, see Polybius 12.26.2) and royal decrees (Dan 3:16; 3 Macc 7:20); see further G. Delling, TDNT 8:36-37; W. Grimm, EDNT 2:41.


13. E.g., LXX Deut 32:15; Ps 23:5; 24:5; 27:9; 41:6; Isa 12:2; 17:10; 43:3; 60:16; see Towner, Goal, 75-77 (and notes).
world through the gift of his Son. Use of the title for Christ, however, was slow to develop in the NT and limited to the later Paul (Ephesians; Philippians; 2 Timothy; Titus) and 2 Peter. Perhaps ambivalence about the term's use in the Imperial cult for the deified emperor\textsuperscript{14} delayed its Christian application. When it was finally applied to Christ, drawing meaning from the biblical tradition, it may well have been in response to the escalating influence of the stories, symbols, and expectations of the Imperial cult on the church and culture. Given this environment especially, and the earlier use of the language of Hellenistic kings, heroes, and gods,\textsuperscript{15} we should not imagine that a Christian co-opting of such politically loaded language was simply a matter of convenience — the language was chosen deliberately to make a point.

In these three letters God and Christ Jesus are both designated “Savior.” God is “Savior” in the sense of being the architect and initiator of the salvation plan (1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10, 13; 3:4). Christ is “Savior” in that he is the means by which this salvation plan is implemented in history (2 Tim 1:10; Titus 3:6; cf. 1:4).

But when these letters are viewed individually, three distinct patterns of usage influenced by separate christological portraits are visible (see Introduction, 59-67). In Titus, where Christology is at its highest and God and Christ are presented as co-equals, both God and Christ bear the title in intentionally close proximity (Titus 1:3, 4; 3:4, 6). In 2 Timothy, where Christology provides a pattern for hope and vindication, the title is reserved for Christ alone (2 Tim 1:10).

What is striking about the “Savior” title in 1 Timothy is its suppression as a christological category. Only God is designated “Savior” (1:1; 2:3; 4:10). It is true that the activity associated with the “Savior” designation is implicit in and through use of the “salvation" (σωτηρία) word group and other theological formulations of the Christ event (e.g., 1:15). Yet the absence of the title as a christological reference reflects the decision not to make the claims associated with it in this letter; the choice to emphasize other elements of Christology (see below on 2:5-6) determined this course.\textsuperscript{16}

Christ Jesus, seen here as sharing in that act commanding Paul to


\textsuperscript{15} A title of honor for men of renown (Xenophon, \textit{Agesilaus} 11.13); of Zeus (Plutarch, \textit{Moralia} 830B); of Ptolemy (Plutarch, \textit{Moralia} 361F); of Antiochus (Strabo, \textit{Geography} 11.10.2); see further Dibelius and Conzelmann, 102-3.