

# Colossians and Philemon

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19 20 21 22 23 24 25      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Wanda and Brian Cates and Charlene and Jeremy Cates,  
who have welcomed us into their Maine Downeast community  
and with whom my wife and I have had much good fellowship in the Lord

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# Introduction to Colossians

## Authorship

### *Arguments for a Pseudonymous Author*

#### VOCABULARY AND STYLISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

Though anticipated in the nineteenth century, in the early twentieth century scholars set forth arguments that Paul did not write Colossians.<sup>1</sup>

One argument was that the vocabulary of Colossians was so different from Paul's other accepted genuine epistles that Colossians must be considered to have been written by someone else. The number of once-occurring words (thirty-four hapax legomena; see Pascuzzi 2013: 229) was seen to be so numerous that this pointed away from Paul being the author. If the epistle were authentic, would not more words be used that were in common with Paul's usual vocabulary?

However, a comparison of word statistics between one epistle and another to determine authorship is a precarious criterion to use. For example, there are among Paul's accepted authentic letters just as many once-occurring words as in purported pseudepigraphical letters.<sup>2</sup> In addition, there is insufficient data to determine Paul's standard style (Paul's seven purportedly authentic letters do not provide a big enough sample to determine this). Furthermore, it is plausible that the kinds of words used in writing to a particular church would be significantly shaped by the unique circumstances of the church and the particular occasion that prompted the writing of the letter. Finally, a person's writing style in choice of vocabulary can change significantly over time. Consider even today how a scholar's writing style usually changes significantly from student days to the time of retirement. Some have adduced the unique syntactical style of Colossians as evidence of non-Pauline authorship.<sup>3</sup> But, again, the very same argument adduced above against the vocabulary criterion

1. One estimate is that 60 percent of contemporary scholars believe that Colossians was not written by Paul; see D. Moo 2008: 29, who gives a sampling of scholars not holding to Pauline authorship and others holding to it. See J. White 2017: 90–91, listing recent German and English-speaking scholars holding to ultimate Pauline authorship of Colossians.

2. E.g., Colossians uses 87 words not found in the accepted seven authentic epistles, but Philippians (accepted as Pauline) contains 79 unique words; see D. Moo 2008: 30.

3. See, e.g., Schweizer 1982: 18, listing several kinds of syntactical constructions that occur in Colossians and do not occur in Paul's undisputed letters (such as combinations of synonymous constructions, how genitives are strung together, difficult and long sentences or relative clauses strung loosely together).

can equally be brought forward in response to syntactical arguments against Paul's authorship.<sup>4</sup> In fact, every unusual stylistic feature in Colossians, with the exception of ὅ (ἅ) ἔστιν (*ho [ha] estin*, which is, 2:17, 22), can be found in the so-called authentic letters, though with less frequency (see Pascuzzi 2013: 230).

In this connection, Paul may have coauthored the epistle with Timothy (cf. Col. 1:1), but this is unlikely due to the repeated use of "I" throughout the letter, capped by the conclusion of "I, Paul, write this letter in my own hand." However, one must also take into consideration the fact that Paul used secretaries and that there were a variety of ways in which authors dictated in the ancient world. For example, Cicero (*Att.* 333, 13.25) speaks of two kinds of dictation to secretaries: "Tiro, who is by way of taking down whole sections together," but "Spintharus" wrote down "syllable by syllable."<sup>5</sup> If Paul dictated this letter using the looser approach, then the letter could well reflect the secretary's choice of vocabulary with respect to synonyms and interpretative paraphrases. One argument along these lines of a looser dictation method is that of Dunn. Dunn actually believes technically that Paul did not even dictate the letter but that one of his disciples or coworkers (probably Timothy) composed it on his behalf; next Paul read it or had it read to him, and then he approved (and possibly revised?) it before it was sent to the Colossians. Accordingly, Paul's secretary would have been "familiar with the broad pattern of Paul's letter-writing" and possibly Paul was "content to leave it to the secretary to formulate the letter with a fair degree of license, perhaps under the conditions of his imprisonment, at that point able only to add the briefest of personal conclusions (see on 4:18)" (Dunn 1995: 38). Dunn concludes that what may appear to be different theological concepts or different theological emphases of the secretary are not contradictory to Paul's thought, since they would represent the secretary's interpretation of Paul's theology, which Paul would have condoned authoritatively as organic and consistent developments of his own thought. This is a speculative and convoluted view. Nevertheless, even this extreme view of secretarial use would still theoretically fall within the bounds of the epistle being considered ultimately to be by Paul (Dunn 1995: 38) and thus to bear his apostolic authority. Such a phenomenon occurs today in the United States, for example, with presidential speech writers. The speech writer writes a speech; the President looks it over, perhaps does some revision, and then delivers the speech.

Thus Paul either wrote the epistle himself or authorized it to be dictated to a secretary or coauthored it with Timothy. The first two options are the most probable. One could say that "Paul 'owned' the content even though its crafting and articulation may be the work of others" (Pascuzzi 2013: 227).

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4. See O'Donnell (1999) for an elaboration of the fallacy of trying to discern authorship via the above criteria of vocabulary, syntax, and other facets of writing style, which I have subsequently found to be helpful (see excursus 1).

5. I am grateful to Gordon Fee for bringing this text from Cicero to my attention.

## THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Commentators commonly acknowledge that one of the criteria for discerning non-Pauline authorship of Colossians is that some of its theological concepts do not appear to be consistent with Paul's theology in his seven supposedly authentic letters.<sup>6</sup> But such an idea is based on the assumption that Paul's thought developed along a linear chronological trajectory, beginning with less developed to more developed ideas, and that even more developed notions can be identified as too advanced for Paul. But how can one be sure that the purportedly more advanced ideas by Paul could not have arisen before the supposedly less developed. And how can one be certain that what is said to be too advanced for Paul is really so?<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, it is overly optimistic to think that one can define the degree of latitude a writer has before he comes to the point of self-contradiction<sup>8</sup> or a point beyond which he could not conceivably think. Among concepts usually adduced are Christology, eschatology, ecclesiology, and the Christian life.<sup>9</sup>

Christology, especially in 1:15–17, is usually seen to be more advanced than in Paul's undisputed letters. Here Christ is portrayed as existing eternally before the beginning of the first creation as a fully divine being. But certainly 1 Cor. 8:4–6 and Phil. 2:6–11 are virtually as explicit about Christ's deity (e.g., mentioned by Dunn 1995: 36), the latter also focusing on Christ's preexistence. But some see that the Christology of Col. 1:19–20 and 2:9 is even an explicit step beyond anything else in the accepted epistles of Paul (so Dunn 1995: 36). However, when these passages are placed within an OT temple context (see my comments on 1:19; 2:9), then they can be seen as a development of Paul's own temple theology, which is also elsewhere in Paul based on the OT (e.g., see 1 Cor. 3:9–17; cf. 2 Cor. 6:15–16).

The ecclesiological statement that Christ is “the head of the body” in 1:18a is seen as more in line with the ecclesiology of Eph. 1:21–23 (which is typically also viewed as pseudonymous) than anything one finds in Paul's seven accepted epistles (so Dunn 1995: 36). But why could this not be a development by Paul himself, especially since he has already discussed believers being the “body of Christ” (NIV: 1 Cor. 10:16; 12:27, the latter reading, “Now you are the body of Christ”)?<sup>10</sup> Pascuzzi (2013: 238) argues that though Paul does not refer to Christ as “head” of the body in 1 Cor. 12, it does not mean that he could not

6. The seven NT letters accepted by all scholars to have been originally written by Paul are Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

7. See Pascuzzi (2013: 237) on raising questions about the assumptions concerning the way Paul's ideas developed.

8. See Carson and Moo 2005: 518, in dependence on L. T. Johnson 1972: 394–95.

9. E.g., see Dunn 1995: 36, listing these topics as typical theological issues that have raised questions about the authorship of Colossians. D. Moo (2008: 32–33) also mentions the view held by some that a pseudonymous author sought to attach Paul's apostolic authority to a generation of teachers who arose after Paul's death, which some think points to a time later than Paul, to which D. Moo well responds.

10. D. Moo (2008: 34) has pointed out the 1 Corinthians evidence.

have conceived the notion prior to the writing of Colossians, especially since 1 Cor. 11:3 says, “Christ is the head of every man,” which comes close to Christ being the head of the whole church. Some contend that Paul apparently did not think of the church as a supralocal (i.e., universal) reality prior to Colossians, so that such an idea in the letter indicates that it cannot be genuinely Pauline. But, again, Pascuzzi argues, why could not Paul have genuinely developed this notion?<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it is evident that Paul conceived of the church as universal in his earlier so-called genuine epistles (Gal. 1:13; 1 Cor. 12:28; 15:9) and Col. 4:15–16 expresses a local use of church (so Brown 1997: 612).<sup>12</sup>

One of the most common theological objections to Pauline authorship is that Colossians has a “realized” view of eschatology, whereas in the undisputed letters the futuristic eschatology is purported to be typical. Many have responded to this by acknowledging the “inaugurated” emphasis in Colossians (1:13; 1:18; 1:26; 2:12–13; 3:1–3; 3:10) but also noting the presence of a definite future perspective (1:5; 1:27b; 3:4; 3:6; 3:24; 3:25). And in the undisputed epistles, in fact, Paul has a robust “already” and “not yet” view of eschatology.<sup>13</sup> The inaugurated eschatology in Colossians is due to the occasion of the false teachers questioning the believers’ status in Christ and the sufficiency of their faith. Paul wants to assure them that they significantly participate already in end-time blessings in Christ (see Pascuzzi 2013: 240–41).

Some also see the household code in Col. 3:18–4:1 to be so different from the authentic Paul’s portrayal of Christian living that it cannot be from Paul’s hand (again, it is uniquely parallel in the Pauline corpus to the household code in Eph. 5:21–6:9, which is likewise viewed as non-Pauline). But why could not Paul himself have developed his own thought on this subject? Even if there were not responses to the objections about Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology above, why could these not also be Paul’s own legitimate developments of his thinking?<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, almost anything that appears in Colossians that does not appear in the undisputed Pauline writings is seen as evidence of inauthenticity, whether it be Paul’s suffering for the church (1:24) or the explicit reference to the Spirit (1:8) or to the law as a shadow of future fulfillment (2:17; see Schweizer 1982: 16–18), in addition to the above-mentioned notions. This is an inaccurate

11. And Pascuzzi (2013) adds that if Col. 1:18a is a pre-Pauline hymn, which is almost universally held by scholars, then neither Paul nor even a pseudepigrapher was responsible originally for the idea of Christ being the head of the church body, since it was pre-Pauline tradition, though Paul (or the pseudonymous author) would have agreed with the view by incorporating it into his letter.

12. Pascuzzi (2013: 38) adds Phil. 3:6 and 1 Cor. 10:32 to passages in Paul’s “accepted” letters that refer to the universal church, and she thinks that 1 Cor. 1:12 and 2 Cor. 1:1 can be included with these passages.

13. See Beale 2011: passim; e.g., see Rom. 6:1–13 for the inaugurated end-time resurrection and future resurrection; see also Rom. 8:1–25 for the present and future eschatological work of the Spirit.

14. See D. Moo (2008: 32–37) for good responses to most of these theological objections to Pauline authorship.

criterion, since one can find things in even an accepted epistle that cannot be found in the other accepted letters. But even if this were not the case, why cannot an author develop new thoughts in his own writings?

### *Conclusion on the Issue of Pseudonymity*

I remember attending the New Testament Seminar at Cambridge University, where Harold Hoehner delivered a paper titled “Did Paul Write Galatians?” The paper facetiously concluded that Paul should not be considered to be the author of Galatians when that epistle is judged according to the typical pseudepigraphical criteria used to determine the non-Pauline authorship of Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles. The point of the paper (later published as Hoehner 2006) was to show in detail that Pauline scholars are very inconsistent in judging Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles to be inauthentic, while accepting that Paul wrote Galatians. Galatians has an impersonal style compared to the other six accepted epistles (Hoehner 2006: 153–55). In comparison to the other six supposedly authentic Pauline letters, Galatians also has thirty hapax legomena and quite a few vocabulary words that are uncommon, as well as historical and theological peculiarities (Hoehner 2006: 155–67). As Gupta (2013b: 213) says, “The whole scope and depth of research Hoehner offers against viewing Galatians as authentic is impressive.” Hoehner shows convincingly that if these scholars applied the same criteria to Galatians as they have to the supposedly inauthentic letters, they should conclude that Galatians also is not genuine. As I recall, there was not much response to Hoehner’s paper. This illustrates the subjective nature of the criteria commonly employed to determine non-Pauline authorship.

After all, as in each of the seven Pauline letters most frequently accepted by scholars as Pauline, Colossians is also said to be written by “Paul” (Col. 1:1). In Col. 4:18 Paul “writes this greeting with” his “own hand,” which is a way of expressing the epistle’s Pauline authenticity. It also assumes that most of the epistle has been dictated to a secretary (O’Brien 1982: 259). Use of secretaries was common in the Greco-Roman world, and often secretaries were not referred to or named.<sup>15</sup> Such a signature protected against false teachers writing in Paul’s name (as warned against in 2 Thess. 2:2). This authoritative apostolic signature reminds the hearers of Paul’s authority in all he says in the epistle, especially his warnings about and objections to the false teachers. His signature along with a note in his own hand (as in 1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Philem. 19) probably has the same significance. It is commonly known that such added signatures at the ends of letters were a feature in Greco-Roman letters as well (see references in Dunn 1996: 289; and Bruce 1984: 186, who also notes that such signatures were appended when a secretary wrote the letter).

15. So Pao (2012: 322, and sources cited there), who also notes that at the end of Romans (16:22), Paul does not supply an autograph, though he makes explicit that “Tertius” was his secretary.

In this light, if Paul did not write Colossians, then the pseudonymous author was deceiving by saying “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.” It does not ameliorate the deceptive motive by saying that this signature by an anonymous author was an attempt to give his letter an aura of Pauline authority, since deception would still be involved.

Many who hold to a non-Pauline author usually do not think the author was trying to deceive. But such commentators have difficulty in overcoming the evidence that the pseudonymous author was trying to deceive. In fact, they have failed to argue persuasively that no deception took place. It is hard to explain away an attempt to deceive, since the letter is said to be written by “Paul.” Paul twice warns the readers against “delusion” (Col. 2:4) or “deception” (2:8). Would a pseudonymous author “who speaks of deceit like this put the name of Paul to a letter he himself had composed?” (Carson and Moo 2005: 349).

Further complications for proposals for a pseudonymous author are the personal comments and instructions that are given in Col. 4:7–18. If Paul himself did not write these, then they are a fiction, unless one speculates that Paul wrote these before his death and they were inserted here. But even if so, it would make it appear that Paul had written the entirety of the letter up to 4:7, which would still result in the majority of the letter being a fiction. And if this were a literary technique giving the fictitious author an air of Pauline authority, would the addressees not have known this, which would invalidate such an intent?<sup>16</sup> Alternatively, if the addressees were not aware that the letter was not authentic, then it is difficult to resist the idea that the anonymous author intended to deceive, even if the deception was aimed to bring about a good pastoral and theological goal (cf. similarly D. Moo 2008: 332–34). It has been argued that Col. 4:7–18 is meant to strengthen the Pauline authority of some anonymous writer (MacDonald 2000: 184). However, in what way could a pseudonymous letter enhance the authority of an author unknown to the readers?<sup>17</sup> “The hard evidence demands that we conclude either that some New Testament documents are pseudonymous and that the . . . authors intended to deceive their readers, or that the real authors intended to speak the truth and that pseudonymity is not attested in the New Testament.”<sup>18</sup> The latter is more probable.

Some believe there was a pseudepigraphical genre that did not necessitate the notion of deception. This issue, in part, concerns whether there are other Greek and Jewish pseudepigraphical writings that are comparable to the genre of Colossians. Some contend that such pseudepigraphical letters can be found, but even these (like the Epistle of Jeremiah and the Letter of Aristeas) are substantially different from the epistolary genre of Colossians (so D. Moo 2008:

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16. The personal and urgent request of Paul that is to be addressed by the Colossians to Archippus in 4:17 is an illustration of such details; following Witherington 2007: 201.

17. So Witherington 2007: 201–2; see also the introduction to 4:7–18 below.

18. Carson and Moo 2005: 350; and 346–50, discussing pseudonymity in relation to deception.

38). There are also no examples of recognized ancient pseudepigraphical writings composed within ten to twenty years after the purported author's death, which is a frame of time most of those supporting pseudonymity propose. Such writings were usually produced hundreds of years after the purported writer's death, and for the most part, the identity of the pseudonymous author was, and continues to remain, undiscoverable (Pascuzzi 2013: 232). And though many modern scholars accept pseudonymity among OT books, the early Christians apparently did not, so that there is no evidence they were consciously producing pseudonymous works that stood in line with some acceptable Jewish tradition (Pascuzzi 2013: 232–33). But even if Colossians were part of such an accepted pseudepigraphical genre that did not attempt to deceive, was it accepted widely enough in the church for recipients of the letter to appreciate that it was not an attempt to deceive? There is no such evidence. In fact, what evidence there is on the subject is to the contrary. In AD 200 Serapion, bishop of Antioch, said: "We receive both Peter and the other apostles as Christ, but the writings which falsely bear their names we reject, . . . knowing that such were not handed down to us."<sup>19</sup> Thus it is unlikely that such a pseudepigraphical genre that did not attempt to deceive ever existed within the church. So if Colossians was written by someone other than Paul, we must conclude that the author was trying to deceive.<sup>20</sup>

The unanimous patristic testimony to the authenticity of Colossians should be taken more seriously, since they were quite aware of some church writings that were pseudonymous and that they accordingly condemned. Indeed, the early church made distinctions on the basis of established criteria (style, content, and character) between accepted, genuine writings, disputed writings, and spurious writings.<sup>21</sup> This is especially the case at a time when reception history is becoming increasingly significant for interpretation of biblical texts (following here Gupta 2013b: 211–12).

### *Conclusion on Authorship*

In the light of the preceding discussion, we judge that the following criteria are not sufficient to rule out Paul as the ultimate author of Colossians: vocabulary, literary style, theological development, and comparisons with other pseudepigraphical genre or writings. Paul's own development in his writing style and theology or his use of various kinds of secretaries or variations in circumstances sufficiently explain any significant differences from the seven accepted Pauline letters. The church fathers also testify to Colossians as authentically Pauline. Our conclusions are in line with that of Pascuzzi (2013: 245):

Two key assumptions supporting the case for authenticity, namely that Paul's letters were occasional and that they were collaborative creations, are premises that are almost universally agreed on in Pauline scholarship today. They are

19. See D. Moo 2008: 38, citing Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 6.12.1–6, where the citation is found.

20. See D. Moo (2008: 37–40) for secondary sources pro and con with respect to pseudepigraphy.

21. Pascuzzi 2013: 232, citing Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* 3.25.1–7.

not determinative for establishing Colossians' authenticity. However, they have the advantage of being widely accepted, and they favor the letter's authenticity because they can best account for indisputable variations in style and developments, or changed emphases in theology. The circumstances in the Colossian community can explain the theological development and emphases in this letter. The collaborative aspect of composition can explain the stylistic variations. If we add to this the stylostatistical results of Neumann's study which puts Colossians within, or sufficiently close to, the range of authentic letters, the near certainty that the situation that occasioned the letter occurred during Paul's lifetime, and the threefold claim within the letter that Paul is its author, there is an accumulation of evidence that reinforces the probability that Colossians is authentic.

In light of this, the assumptions of pseudonymous practices in the early church and of a Pauline school (from which subsequent pseudonymous authors arose) are not compelling (Pascuzzi 2013: 245).

### Place and Date of Writing

The close similarities of Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon show Paul writing from a situation of imprisonment (see Col. 4:3, "the mystery of Christ, for which I have been also imprisoned"; 4:18 NIV, "remember my chains"; Eph. 4:1; 6:20, "I am an ambassador in chains"; Philem. 1, 9, 13 NIV, "I am in chains for the gospel").<sup>22</sup> This is likely the same imprisonment referred to in all three letters. So where is this imprisonment? Though there were other periods of imprisonment (cf. 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:23), the most likely options of the place of imprisonment proposed by different commentators are Ephesus (implied from 2 Cor. 1:8; 1 Cor. 15:32[?]), Caesarea (Acts 24:27), or Rome (Acts 28:16–31).

Among other reasons that he offers, the suggestion of N. Wright (1986) appears to point in the right direction. He says that it is more probable that Onesimus would have traveled to Ephesus to see Paul rather than to Rome. And it would have been easier for Paul to send Onesimus back to Colossae and possibly to request that the slave be returned to him again to assist him (cf. Philem. 13–14). Would it not be asking a lot for Onesimus to travel from Rome to Colossae and then return to Rome again, especially when he had already come to Rome initially from Colossae as a part of his escape from slavery? On top of this, Wright concludes, since Paul saw Rome as a staging post on his journey to Spain (Rom. 15:22–29), it is unlikely that Paul would be desiring to visit Philemon so soon after his hoped-for imminent release from prison in Rome (see N. Wright 1986: 35).

If this is correct, then the Letter to Colossae would have been written in the early 50s, during the time of Paul's extended ministry in Ephesus, which lasted for over two years (see Acts 19:8–10). Nevertheless, while Wright's speculation is plausible, it is hard to be confident about whether Paul wrote from Ephesus or Rome.

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22. This section is a summary of N. Wright 1986: 34–39, though much of what Wright says is generally acknowledged.



- ▶ I. Letter Opening: Paul and Timothy Desire Grace and Peace for the Colossians (1:1–2)
- II. Letter Thanksgiving: Paul Thanks God for the Readers’ Christian Lives (1:3–23)
- III. Letter Body: Christians Should Strive for Maturity (1:24–4:6)
- IV. Letter Closing: Paul Emphasizes His Pastoral Concern for the Colossians (4:7–18)

## I. Letter Opening: Paul and Timothy Desire Grace and Peace for the Colossians (1:1–2)

Just as most modern letters contain an opening address (“Dear . . .”), often an introductory wish (“I hope all is well with you”), a body that contains the main part of the letter, and a concluding farewell (“Sincerely,” “With best wishes” + the sender’s name), so Hellenistic letters had the similar basic structure. As we will see, Paul adapts this variant fourfold Hellenistic letter convention, especially by injecting Christian theology into it. For example, the opening address in Colossians of “Paul” is expanded to “an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,” a typical expression added in various ways in Paul’s other letters. This is an adaptation of the Hellenistic letter, in which the letter replaces the writer’s presence. Yet as we will see in the case of Paul, the letter represents not merely Paul’s presence but also his apostolic authority over the recipients. This apostolic authority actually entails that the letter carries with it the authority of God and Christ, whom Paul represents in each letter, including that of the one sent to the Colossians. The second part of the ancient letter was a generic greeting, which Paul replaces with the theologically charged “grace and peace,” typically followed by “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” which indicates further that behind Paul’s letter-writing stand God and Christ. Colossians follows this pattern, though it has only “from God our Father,” for some reason omitting “and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul never structures the parts of his epistles as merely formal, stylistic formulas, but as we have already begun to see, he packs his letters with theological substance and means every word he says. He cares deeply about the people to whom he writes his epistles, and there is much feeling expressed in his letters, including his introductory greetings. This is certainly true of his Letter to the Colossians. The main point of verses 1–2 is in verse 2, which states the goal of the letter: that God would give “grace and peace” to the recipients, which they will need to stand against the false teaching and to persevere and grow in their faith, which the remainder of the epistle will make clear.

### Exegesis and Exposition

<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus [through] the will of God, and Timothy our brother,  
<sup>2</sup>to the saints at Colossae and [the faithful brothers] in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father [ ] .

**1:1** Paul's greeting first focuses upon his office as an "apostle" (ἀπόστολος, *apostolos*). He is an "apostle of Christ Jesus," which likely expresses that he belongs to Christ (a possessive genitive, though possibly also including the notion that he was sent out by Christ [a subjective genitive], as expressed explicitly in Gal. 1:1; on the two senses of the genitive here, see Wallace [1996: 82] as well as Harris [2010: 7]).<sup>1</sup> Paul was called as an apostle through "the will of God."<sup>2</sup> This call happened to Paul when the resurrected Christ appeared to him on the Damascus road and commissioned him (Acts 9:3–19; 22:6–16; 26:12–20; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:7–9). Thus Paul's apostleship is grounded in the authoritative call of the resurrected Christ. He became an apostle through the working of God's powerful will and not through his own independent decision making (Melick 1991: 188). The initial mention of Paul himself as an "apostle" in this verse suggests that the letter ultimately carries his own apostolic authority. As an apostle, he represents the authority of the Messiah. Thus Paul's self-reference as an "apostle" refers to his unique office and is qualitatively different from other uses of "apostle" to designate mere human messengers (cf. NASB marginal readings at Phil. 2:25 and 2 Cor. 8:23) or approved missionaries (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:5–6; 15:7; cf. Gal. 2:9; on which see D. Moo 2008: 74).<sup>3</sup> Paul's mention of "Christ [Messiah] Jesus" is used so much by him (as is the word order of "Jesus Christ") that one might think it has become a mere name carrying little theological freight. However, the name probably at least evokes the OT expectation of a Messiah, who is now identified with Christ (likewise D. Moo 2008: 75; Bird 2009: 34).<sup>4</sup> This point is possibly enhanced by "Christ" being placed first, as in "Messiah Jesus."

The greeting is not only from Paul but also from Timothy (so also in the greeting sections of 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1). The mention of Timothy here and in the other introductions indicates, at least, that he is one of Paul's "fellow workers" in the ministry (Rom. 16:21; 1 Thess. 3:2; cf. 1 Cor. 16:10), but it may also imply that he is Paul's secretary (it is less likely that this implies multiple authorship). Paul and other NT writers used secretaries in other letters (he dictated Romans to Tertius: Rom. 16:22; Peter used Silvanus as a secretary: 1 Pet. 5:12). Besides being a "fellow worker," Timothy accompanied Paul in his travels (Acts 16:1–20:4; Phil. 2:19;

1. It may also merely be a genitive of relationship, describing Paul's apostleship to be bound up in some indefinable way with Christ (so D. Moo 2008: 75, though he mentions the subjective genitive possibility in light of Gal. 1:1).

2. See Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11.

3. See Bruce (1984: 38) for a good, though dated, bibliography on the notion of apostleship in Paul's letters and in the NT in general.

4. For the use of the "anointed one" or "Messiah" with reference to the coming end-time king in the OT, see Ps. 2:2 (cf. 2:7) and Dan. 9:25–26 (cf. Pss. 89:19–29 [88:20–30 LXX] and 132:10–12 [131:10–12 LXX], where David is the "anointed" one and is related to his descendants, who will rule forever). For the same use of "anointed" in Judaism, see 1 En. 48.10; 52.4; Pss. Sol. 17.36; 18.6, 8; in Qumran the same kind of eschatological use of "Messiah" occurs in, e.g., CD-A 12.23; 14.19; CD-B 19.10; 1Q28a (= 1QSa) 2.12, 20. See also Pokorný 1991: 35.

1 Thess. 3:6), preached alongside him (2 Cor. 1:19), and represented Paul's teachings to others (1 Cor. 4:17). Therefore it is natural that Paul calls him a "brother" at the end of verse 1,<sup>5</sup> and accordingly it is natural that Timothy would be one of Paul's secretaries.

Use of secretaries is also implied by the way Paul brings attention to his own unique signature at the conclusion of some of his epistles (with statements like "I, Paul write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write": 2 Thess. 3:17 NIV; likewise 1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11). This is highlighted in Col. 4:18: "the greeting [is] by my hand, Paul."\* This also indicates that Paul is the true author, even if writing through a secretary.

Furthermore, that Paul's secretaries did not have an independent hand in composing the letters is apparent from the way dictation took place in the ancient world. Cicero mentions two kinds of dictation: a looser dictation method, in which secretaries listened and wrote down "whole sections"; and a more strict method, in which secretaries wrote down "syllable by syllable" (Cicero, *Att.* 333, 13.25).<sup>6</sup> Even the looser manner of dictation would not have meant that Paul's secretaries had an autonomous role in writing, since it is highly probable that Paul would have read the letter himself before sending it off, or he would have had the letter read back to him, to ensure that what the letter finally said represented precisely what he wanted to convey.

In addition, the initial mention of Paul himself as an apostle before the comment about Timothy, who is not called an "apostle," suggests that the letter ultimately represents Paul's own apostolic authority (so also Lincoln 2000: 587). Moreover, Paul's authority behind the letter is also reflected by passages where the first-person pronoun (*I/my*), referring to Paul, is found (such as Col. 1:23–25, 29; 2:1, 4–5; 4:3–4, 7–8, 10, 13, 16, 18), which finds close and numerous parallels in the epistles unanimously accepted by all to be Pauline (e.g., Phil. 2:19–28; 1 Thess. 2:18; 3:5; 5:27; see Barth and Blanke 1994: 143). The same evidence points away from a disciple of Paul first composing a letter independently but in the name of Paul and with Paul's ultimate approval (as argued by Schweizer 1982: 15–24; Dunn 1996: 44, 47).<sup>7</sup>

Hence, with these qualifications in mind, it is appropriate that Timothy may have had some part in writing this letter as a secretary. It is possible, however, that mention of Timothy is merely Paul's way of commending him as a faithful "fellow worker" in the ministry, or the mention may merely indicate that he was formally commissioned by Paul to deliver his letter (so Doty 1973: 30). All of the above ideas are not mutually exclusive of one another and may be in mind. It is interesting that Timothy is likely referred to as among the "apostles" in 1 Thess. 2:6–7 (cf. 1 Thess. 1:1), but that was more

5. Yet we will see in Col. 1:2 that "brother" includes the notion of fellow believers being part of a family.

6. I thank Gordon Fee for first bringing this text from Cicero to my attention many years ago.

7. In agreement with Barth and Blanke 1994: 144.