

A Taxonomy of Emphasis in Paul's Early, Middle, and Later Letters

August 26, 2018

Ames/Des Moines CityChurch

OK, Paul wrote Early, Middle,
and Later Letters, Got It,
So What?

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Paul's Letters

Jeff is in the midst of an extended series of Sunday morning teaching (related to the development of Mastering the Scripture booklets) on Paul's Letters (Early, Middle, and Later).

We are in the "middle" of the Middle Letters.

Paul's Letters

What are the Early, Middle, and Later Letters?

Paul's Letters

Early Letters

Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians,
1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Romans

Middle

Ephesians, Philippians,
Colossians, Philemon

Later

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus

Paul's Letters

What makes a letter “early,” “middle,” or “later?”

Paul's Letters

The date of writing makes a letter
“early,” “middle,” or “later.”

Early = Autumn 49 to Autumn 56 A.D.

Middle = Autumn 60 to Spring 62 A.D.

Later = Autumn 62 to Autumn 67 A.D.

Paul's Letters

Is it just the date of writing that makes a letter
“early,” “middle,” or “later”?

Early = Autumn 49 to Autumn 56 A.D.

Middle = Autumn 60 to Spring 62 A.D.

Later = Autumn 62 to Autumn 67 A.D.

They are all pretty close together, particularly the
gap between Middle and Later.

Paul's Letters

What makes a letter “early,” “middle,” or “later?”

Paul's Letters

The relative date of writing
and the emphasis in content makes
a letter “early,” “middle,” or “later.”

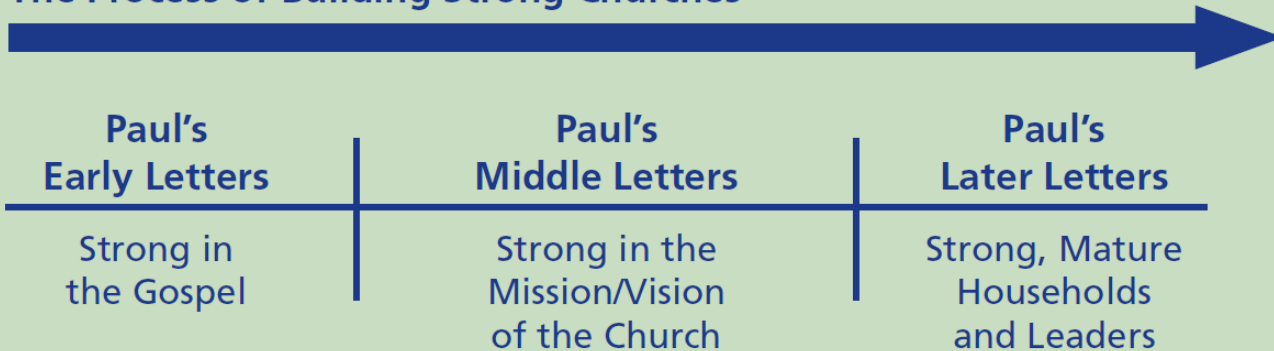
Paul's Letters

The relative date of writing
and the emphasis in content makes
a letter “early,” “middle,” or “later.”

So what is the emphasis in content of each?

Paul's Letters as Establishing Tools

The Process of Building Strong Churches



Early Letters of Paul

The early letters of Paul were all intended to establish the churches in the gospel. If this foundation was not laid, then they could not go on to be mature churches. Think through these letters: Galatians—don't follow a different gospel; 1 & 2 Thessalonians—stand firm in the gospel; 1 & 2 Corinthians—defense of the gospel applied to lots of divisions and confusions; and Romans was written as the great treatise of the gospel—Paul's intent was to establish the Romans in the gospel (Romans 16:25–27).

The Middle Letters

The middle letters are all similar in terminology and emphasis. The full plan of the Church is revealed in Ephesians and Colossians. The churches are encouraged to strive together for the progress of the gospel, and this can only be done if they are one-minded around the plan of Christ, the Church.

How could they be one-minded if they were not established in the gospel and were not willing to build their churches around Christ and His administration, the Church?

The Later Letters of Paul

1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are Paul's final letters. They are all similar in style as well. Paul reviews for Timothy and Titus how to build strong families and leaders in the church and how to make each church a big household—a family of families. If the churches did not have strong leaders, no one would protect the community from false teachers coming in and upsetting whole families. And without a strong church family (community), there would be no impact in the city.

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So what is the emphasis in content of each?

Paul's Letters

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So what is the emphasis in content of each?

Early = Basic
Middle = Advanced
Later = Perpetuating

Paul's Letters

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a letter “early,” “middle,” or “later.”

So what is the emphasis in content of each?

Gospel
Community (Church)
Morality
Mission

Paul's Letters

The relative date of writing and the emphasis in content is what makes a letter “early,” “middle,” or “later.”

	Early Basic	Middle Advanced	Later Perpetuating
Gospel	_____	_____	_____
Church	_____	_____	_____
Morality	_____	_____	_____
Mission	_____	_____	_____

(see handout)

Paul's Letters

Pick any passage (not just a verse and not the whole letter) from your table's assignment of one of Paul's letters.

1. Does the passage address Gospel, Community (Church), Morality, Mission, or something else?
2. Does the passage seem to fit the Basic, Advanced, or Perpetuating emphasis of its letter?
3. Discuss with others at your table.

Paul's Letters

So what?

Paul's Letters

- Paul's letters are indeed a curriculum to help individual believers, leaders, households, and churches move from Basic Faith to Advanced Maturity to Perpetuating Progress of the Gospel.
- As we use each letter (and each passage within each letter), we should be alert to what it is trying to do relative to the other letters in order to follow the pattern given in 2 Tim. 2:2.

Paul's Letters

- Pay special attention to the things that are emphasized in the letters, but not necessarily given much attention by you.
- Tonight in house churches, continue to discuss the overall “taxonomy” of Paul’s letters and perhaps some additional random passages in light of the “taxonomy.”