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## The Sequence of Paul's Letters\*

### A. Methodology

Pauline scholarship of the past half-century has exhibited great uniformity in its reconstruction of the sequence of events in Paul's life. With few exceptions, scholars have used the Book of Acts as the basic outline into which they have inserted Paul's letters as seemed appropriate. Open any scholarly work on Paul, and the chances are overwhelmingly great that the date and place of composition assigned to a given Pauline letter will be based primarily on the evidence of Acts. The six pages of fine print which form the appendix to my *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* list scholarly works which follow this method.<sup>1</sup> The names of their authors read like a 'Who's Who' of New Testament scholarship.

And yet, in spite of this virtual unanimity of opinion, scholars when writing about Paul's thought do not act as if they really believed it. Although commentators on 1 Corinthians, for example, date the letter from the time of Paul's visit to Ephesus described in Acts 19, few of them make positive use of the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15 in their exegesis of 1 Corinthians 8-10, even though these two passages are (except for a pair of texts in the Book of Revelation) the only points in the New Testament where the problem of meat offered to idols is even mentioned. Paul's letters are treated almost as if they did not have as their background the turbulent life of their remarkable author.

There are two reasons for this attitude: (1) It is maintained that the evidence of Acts indicates that Paul's letters were written late in his career after most of his missionary work had been accomplished. Thus, since Paul's thought had already matured, chronology is of little importance in interpreting the letters.<sup>2</sup> (2) It is maintained that research on Acts in recent years has reinforced the position that Acts is a compilation of sources, many of which contain ancient tradition, to be sure, but which, as they now stand, have been editorially arranged and rewritten in order to demonstrate the author's theological view of history.<sup>3</sup> Thus, chronology derived from such a document is unreliable and should not be used as the basis for interpreting Paul's thought.

That both of the above propositions should be maintained at once is, of

\*[A paper read to the Society of Biblical Literature at Union Theological Seminary, New York, 29 December 1967.]

1. Cf. John C. Hurd, Jr., *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1965), pp. 299-305.

2. For references see *ibid.*, pp. 9f.

3. See *ibid.*, pp. 22-33. To the references given there can now be added M. D. Goulder, *Type and History in Acts* (London: SPCK, 1964).

course, impossible. That many scholars seem to maintain both is perhaps to be explained biographically. Scholars who grew up considering Pauline chronology to be without theological significance under the first proposition have continued to ignore chronology under the second, not noticing that the second is only an argument for setting Acts aside, not for by-passing the chronological problems posed by Paul's letters. Modern research on Acts has made the sequence and relationship of Paul's letters an almost completely open question, and therefore has opened the possibility that chronology may be more theologically relevant than appeared formerly, when the sequence based on Acts was almost everywhere assumed.

A good illustration of the current reluctance of most Pauline scholars to consider the sequential evidence in the letters themselves is the comment of Henry M. Shires in his recent book, *The Eschatology of Paul in the Light of Modern Scholarship*.<sup>4</sup> In criticizing the conviction of R. H. Charles<sup>5</sup> and C. H. Dodd<sup>6</sup> that Paul's eschatological thought changed markedly between the writing of 1 Corinthians 15 and of 2 Corinthians 5, he said: 'The argument is not convincing, Charles and Dodd are both open to the charge that they depend upon the acceptance of a certain chronological sequence for Paul's letters which cannot be proved.' Passing over the fact that nothing can be 'proved' in this type of historical investigation, we may ask whether Professor Shires has not put the matter backwards. What Dodd – to choose the more recent proponent – has seen in the letters does not actually depend on a prior chronological argument. Granted that the first half of his presentation consists of chronological arguments designed to dispose of the theory held by G. S. Duncan and others<sup>7</sup> that the Imprisonment letters (Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon) were written from Ephesus at approximately the same time as the Corinthian correspondence. But Dodd's chronological arguments are prefaced by a most significant comment:

The advocates of the Ephesian theory deprecate any appeal to the evidence of language or thought in determining the relations of Paul's writings one to another. The problem, they insist, is a purely historical one, to be decided on the basis of the known facts of Paul's movements and those of his friends. It is only when we have determined the order of the epistles on such grounds that we can proceed to study their language and thought. Otherwise we introduce a subjective factor, and are in danger of a *circulus in probando*.

The danger no doubt exists; but in determining the relations of ancient writings,

4. *The Eschatology of Paul in the Light of Modern Scholarship* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), pp. 39f.

5. *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life in Israel, in Judaism, and in Christianity* (2nd ed., London: A. & C. Black, 1913); reprinted – except for the last two pages of the text – as *Eschatology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963).

6. 'The Mind of Paul: II,' in his *New Testament Studies* (Manchester: The University Press, 1953), pp. 83–128; originally published in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 18 (1934), 68–110.

7. For bibliography see *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, p. 303, n.6.

we are often obliged to depend on just such considerations of language and thought. . . . It may be urged that to suppose it possible to come to a conclusion solely on the basis of a comparison of the concrete historical data of the epistles on the one hand and the Acts on the other would be to underestimate the fragmentary character of both sources.<sup>8</sup>

What is at stake here becomes clear in the second section of Dodd's presentation, in which he outlined his developmental exposition of Paul's theology. Clearly, if the Imprisonment letters are allowed to fall in the centre of this proposed development, then Dodd's conclusions are demolished. Dodd originally began with a rather traditional version of the chronological sequence based on Acts.<sup>9</sup> Then, however, he came to see theological development at certain points within this sequence, and these theological insights became so important to him that he has not been willing to entertain the hypothesis of an Ephesian – that is, an early – origin for the Imprisonment letters. Thus at these points the chronological sequence for Dodd depends on the interpretation of the theological evidence in the letters, and not vice versa.

Shires and most other scholars, however, seem to have accepted single-mindedly the challenge in Albert Schweitzer's comment on Pauline scholarship 'From Baur to Holtzmann.'<sup>10</sup> He said: 'There is in the works of this period much assertion and little proof regarding the development within Paulinism. One almost gets the impression that the assumption of different stages of thought was chiefly useful as a way of escaping the difficulty about the inner unity of the system.' Thus, for example, D. E. H. Whiteley, in his recent book, *The Theology of St. Paul*, could say: 'St. Paul's theology is very closely integrated. It seems to "cohere" in such a way that it can be made to centre equally well upon the doctrines of, e.g., Christ, the Cross, the Church, and the Last Things.'<sup>11</sup> Whiteley presents Paul's thought according to the traditional sequence by which theology later came to be taught – beginning with the doctrine of creation and ending with the doctrine of last things.

Clearly it would be of immense value to the Pauline scholar if he knew the actual sequence of, and the intervals between, Paul's letters. Lacking such knowledge, it is somewhat surprising that scholars have not expended more effort in seeking to recover it. For the most part, however, such differences and inconsistencies as are noticed in the letters are used to support theories of non-integrity or of non-authenticity. It is difficult to find in the literature of modern Pauline scholarship a passage in which a scholar takes portions of two Pauline letters, shows how they differ in thought, and explains the difference by saying that one appears to be an earlier statement than the other.

Here we might insert two methodological considerations:

8. 'The Mind of Paul,' pp. 87f. On Duncan's methodology see the first part of section B below.

9. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 85, n.1.

10. *Paul and his Interpreters: A Critical History*, trans. W. Montgomery (London: A. & C. Black, 1912), p. 32.

11. *The Theology of St. Paul* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), p. xiv.

(1) Historical problems are of various types. Some have no final solution. Take, for example, the question: What was Judaism like in the first century A.D.? There never was or could have been an answer to this question short of the totality of what could be called Judaism at that time. Even if a first-century man had had at his disposal twentieth-century historical methods – or better – he could not have given more than an approximate answer to this question. Today, of course, we are far less able to respond satisfactorily. The problem of the sequence of Paul's letters, on the other hand, is like an algebraic equation with a single real solution. The answer is simple, finite, and unique. The letters were written in sequence and not simultaneously; they were written in only one sequence. It seems probable that some of the letters in their present form are composite. Nevertheless, once the sections that were originally written as units are identified, there is still only one original sequence in which they were produced. Every sequential clue that is correctly read should therefore point in a single direction.

(2) From time to time it is said – echoing Schweitzer's comment – that the attempt to find sequence in Paul's theology is evidence of an outmoded nineteenth-century 'evolutionism.' It is, of course, true that the letters can be arranged into a sequence on the basis of any index that can be measured or estimated. They can be arranged according to length, for example, or according to the average number of *kai*'s per page. Most scholars, however, would not suppose that they had achieved anything significant by so doing. There are, of course, evolutionary hypotheses in all fields which have been revealed by fuller knowledge to have distorted the facts. In general, however, this is the case, not because the hypothesis was evolutionary, but because an inadequate index of change had been chosen. If the index is chosen with care, then the proposal of a straight-line evolution is far better than no proposal at all. If other indexes indicate the same direction of change, the argument becomes very much more secure. Especially is this true if the indexes are to some extent independent of each other. And as the indexes multiply, the straight line disappears in favour of a more detailed reconstruction.

By this point, it is not unlikely that the reader is already persuaded that the call to examine Paul's letters without regard for Acts – at least initially – in order to marshal all discoverable evidence of sequence is reasonable – but futile. Differences may be observed between parallel passages, but the step from difference to sequence is a very tricky step. Why turn away from what we can see clearly in the texts to consider hypotheses which are uncertain and perhaps misleading? In response two things can be said. (a) Since sequence existed originally, one can go only so far in interpreting the texts if they are treated as though they had been written simultaneously. In fact, this procedure involves a certain danger of misinterpreting the texts, the danger being proportional to the actual amount of time and degree of change between Paul's letters. On the basis of Acts these quantities are assumed to be negligible, but it is precisely this assumption which modern research on Acts calls into question. Recovery of the original sequence is therefore highly desirable.

(b) It is, of course, to be granted that the simple comparison of pairs of texts can be a questionable procedure. There are, however, other ways to proceed, and, in my opinion, there are enough pieces of relatively unambiguous evidence for a solution to be possible, to the extent that any problem of this sort – the synoptic problem would be another example – can be said to be solved. John Knox, particularly in his book, *Chapters in a Life of Paul*, has made an important beginning.<sup>12</sup> Here perhaps I should repeat my conviction that he has vastly simplified the investigation by his proposal of a three-Jerusalem-visit pattern for Paul's career.<sup>13</sup> Knox has eliminated great areas of the unknown from the problem. This is one of the reasons for my optimism about the solution of the problem. A second reason will emerge toward the end of this paper.

In attacking the problem it is necessary, of course, to examine those few suggestions that have been made by scholars on the basis of evidence taken from the letters alone. Except for some concluding remarks, the rest of this paper is devoted to a survey of these suggestions, not because I thought that the very idea of such a survey would capture wide attention, but because an interesting fact emerges, as we shall see at the end.

### *B. Scholarly Proposals about Sequence*

In canvassing modern Pauline scholarship for chronological suggestions, we may notice something rather odd. Almost all of the work that has been done concerns *either* Paul's external world – where he was and what was happening to and around him – *or* Paul's internal world – what he was thinking and saying – but not both.

For example, as Dodd noted, G. S. Duncan in his book, *Paul's Ephesian Ministry*, based his arguments entirely on that evidence from the letters, from Acts, and from sections of the pastoral epistles which relates to the external sphere of Paul's life. In fact, he heaped scorn on those who attempt to find sequence in Paul's theology. Some scholars, he said, have examined the literary affinities of the letters as a clue to their sequence. Others have produced theories of doctrinal development. Duncan asked, however: 'When will criticism learn to appreciate the elementary fact that Paul wrote his letters, not primarily to systematise his latest views on theology, but rather to deal in a living way with certain practical issues . . . in his various churches? . . . We . . . say emphatically that arguments based on alleged affinities of vocabulary or of doctrine may, if used unwarily, lead to very misleading results. In a problem that is primarily historical such evidence ought never

12. *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950). A full bibliography of Knox's work will be found in the volume of essays collected in his honour, *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox*, W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R. R. Niebuhr, editors (Cambridge: The University Press, 1967), pp. xxiii-xxxii. See especially the articles listed for 1936, 1939, 1964, and 1966.

13. See my article, 'Pauline Chronology and Pauline Theology,' in *ibid.*, pp. 225-48 (in particular, pp. 242, 246).

to be used to provide in itself a sure basis for exact conclusions.<sup>14</sup> By 'historical' Duncan meant 'having to do with the external sphere.' He himself began with Acts, failed to make a distinction between primary and secondary historical sources, and based his conclusions on a series of rather doubtful judgments about the value of his sources. Not unexpectedly, there are few who have accepted his results.

Duncan's strictures do illustrate, however, that in looking for work done in the past on the sequence of the letters we shall be looking mainly at those who have worked in only one of the two areas in which evidence of sequence is to be found.

The following scholars have made suggestions about the original order of the letters based on evidence in the letters alone. We shall begin with the two areas which roused Duncan's ire: doctrinal development and literary affinity. Both concern Paul's inner life.

1. *Doctrinal development.* A number of scholars have maintained that Paul's eschatological ideas changed during the period of his letters.<sup>15</sup> R. H. Charles' position is well known and has been influential, especially in Britain. It was, for example, adopted in its entirety by A. M. Hunter in his book, *Paul and his Predecessors*.<sup>16</sup> The sequence of letters which results from this manner of outlining Paul's thought is as follows:

1 Thess. → 1 Cor. → 2 Cor. → Col.  
2 Thess. → Romans → Eph.

This sequence forms what Charles called the 'four stages' in Paul's eschatological thought. In them we move from the fervent apocalypticism of the Thessalonian letters, to an elaborated doctrine in 1 Corinthians of the resurrection of believers at the Parousia, to the belief in 2 Corinthians and Romans that resurrection immediately follows death, and finally to the 'epistles of the "Cosmic Christ,"' Colossians and Ephesians.

F. F. Bruce has also adopted this sequence, but he has elaborated it slightly and supported it with a second index – Paul's teaching about the church as the body of Christ.<sup>17</sup> The result is as follows:

Thess. → 1 Cor. → Phil. → 2 Cor. 1-9 → Rom. → Col.  
Eph.

In 1 Corinthians and in Romans Paul used the metaphor of the 'body' to explain the relationship of church members to one another. In Colossians and Ephesians, however, this metaphor relates the church as a whole to the cosmic Christ.

A somewhat different although related analysis was made by William E.

14. *St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929), pp. 12f.

15. For bibliography see *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, p. 8, nn.2,3.

16. *Paul and his Predecessors* (rev. ed., London: SCM Press, 1961), pp. 98-102, 148.

17. Cf. F. F. Bruce, 'The Epistles of Paul,' in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, M. Black and H. H. Rowley, editors (London: Nelson, 1962), secs. 804a-814a (especially secs. 805e-807c).

Wilson, who examined Paul's thoughts about 'dying and rising again with Christ.'<sup>18</sup> He produced the following sequence:

Thess. → 1 Cor. → Phil. → 2 Cor. 1-9 → Rom.  
Gal.  
Col.

The idea of dying and rising with Christ is absent from the Thessalonian letters and from 1 Corinthians. Paul's suffering recorded in Philippians occasioned the first expression of this doctrine, an expression which appears in more developed form in 2 Corinthians 1-9. Its most developed form is to be found in Galatians, Romans, and Colossians.

C. H. Dodd in the important article mentioned above proposed an eschatological development for Paul's thought in considerable detail.<sup>19</sup> He also used a second index, namely, 'universalism and the idea of reconciliation.'<sup>20</sup> The result is:

Thess. → 1 Cor. → Gal. (?)  
P. L. → 2 Cor. 10-13 → 2 Cor. 1-9 → Rom. → Col. → Eph.

In the Thessalonian letters the Lord will destroy his earthly enemies at his Parousia. By the time of 1 Corinthians, however, the enemies to be destroyed are heavenly, angelic 'powers'; there are only oblique references to the judgment and presumable condemnation of 'those outside,' that is, non-Christians. In Romans 9-11 Paul argued elaborately that the full number of the Gentiles would come in and that the rejection of the Jews would not be ultimate. And in Colossians God is described as 'reconciling all things to Himself.'

2. *Literary affinity.* Since Acts does not provide any clear setting for Galatians - in fact the relation of Galatians to Acts presents notable problems - the literary affinities of the letter to the Galatians have attracted special attention. J. B. Lightfoot's work is the classic example of this approach to the problem of dating Galatians.<sup>21</sup> He argued on the basis of the literary parallels between Galatians and others of Paul's letters that the sequence should be:

2 Cor. → Gal. → Rom.

It might also be mentioned here that he made a similar analysis for Philippians and produced the following sequence:<sup>22</sup>

Phil. → Col.  
Rom. → Eph.

18. Cf. W. E. Wilson, 'The Development of Paul's Doctrine of Dying and Rising Again with Christ,' *The Expository Times*, 42 (1930/31), 562-65.

19. Cf. Dodd, 'The Mind of Paul,' pp. 108-18.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-28. R. H. Charles had already made a similar suggestion, although much more briefly (*Future Life*, pp. 455f.). Note that 'P.L.' in this and in subsequent letter sequences refers to the 'Previous Letter' mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor. 5:9-11.

21. *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (9th ed., London: Macmillan, 1887), pp. 42-50.

22. *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (new ed., London: Macmillan, 1879), pp. 41-46.



His work on this latter point is supported by a number of scholars who do not date Philippians with the other imprisonment epistles at the end of Paul's life.<sup>23</sup>

More recently C. H. Buck, Jr., has re-examined 'The Date of Galatians' on the twin bases of literary dependence among the letters and Paul's use of the key theological terms 'faith' and 'works.'<sup>24</sup> He argued for the sequence:

1 Cor. → 2 Cor. 1-9 → Gal. → Rom.

He observed that the characteristic Pauline antithesis between 'faith' and 'works' found in Galatians and Romans never appears in 1 Corinthians or in 2 Corinthians 1-9, although the terms do occur separately. He considered it unlikely that Paul, having settled on special meanings for these terms, should ever lay them aside, and he therefore argued that these meanings came into Paul's theology after the writing of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians 1-9. His conclusions in turn have been examined and supported with additional argument by Chalmer E. Faw, who adopts the same sequence.<sup>25</sup>

3. *Judaizing crisis.* We turn now to those scholars who have arranged Paul's letters on the basis of evidence relating to Paul's outer life drawn from the letters. Donald Riddle, in his book, *Paul, Man of Conflict*, sorted the letters into three groups on the basis of the presence or absence of references to the Judaizing crisis, which he visualized as occurring shortly after the Jerusalem conference.<sup>26</sup>

Thess.			
P. L.		2 Cor. 10-13	
1 Cor.	→	Galatians	→ Romans
Col./Phlm.		Phil. 3:2-16	2 Cor. 1-9
Phil.			

The letters of the first group contain no mention of the crisis, those of the second are directly involved with it, and those of the third view it in retrospect.

23. For example, Dodd dated Philippians from Paul's final imprisonment ('The Mind of Paul,' pp. 103, 108), although he considered that chronological arguments from style, vocabulary, and theological ideas had less force in the case of this letter than when applied to Colossians and Ephesians (p. 106). However, T. W. Manson, who accepted Dodd's suggestion that the development in Paul's eschatological thought reached a climax in a 'second conversion' between 1 Cor. 15 and 2 Cor. 5, differed with him over the date of Philippians. Thus Manson said: 'It seems to me that the eschatological ideas of Philippians are akin to those of I Cor. . . . and that the theory of a second conversion of Paul is strengthened if we can place the epistle before the conversion' ('The Date of the Epistle to the Philippians,' in his *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles*, M. Black, editor [Manchester: The University Press, 1962], pp. 164f; or as originally published, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 23 [1939], 197f.). For further bibliography see *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, p. 303, n.6. To these can now be added Reginald H. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* ('Studies in Theology,' London: Gerald Duckworth, 1966), pp. 31-34.

24. 'The Date of Galatians,' *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 70 (1951), 113-22.

25. Cf. C. E. Faw, 'The Anomaly of Galatians,' *Biblical Research*, 4 (1960), 25-38.

26. Cf. Donald Riddle, *Paul, Man of Conflict: A Modern Biographical Sketch* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1940), pp. 201-11.

4. *The collection.* John Knox, in *Chapters in a Life of Paul*, adopted a different index for the initial ordering of the letters.<sup>27</sup> He carefully examined all the references in the letters to Paul's efforts to raise money and concluded that they refer to a single project of some magnitude, which was initiated at the 'conference' visit. The result is:

1 Cor. → 2 Cor. → Rom.

In 1 Corinthians 16 Paul refers to 'the collection for the saints' as something about which the Corinthians had already been informed and which was still in its organizational stage. In 2 Corinthians 9 the undertaking is at least a year old and is in need of pepping up, at least as far as the Corinthians are concerned. And in Romans 15 Paul is describing the near completion of the enterprise.

Here again C. H. Buck, Jr., has made a contribution. Working on the basis of Knox's initial pair of articles,<sup>28</sup> he elaborated Knox's conclusions about sequence considerably. In a very compressed article on 'The Collection for the Saints' he argued for the following sequence:<sup>29</sup>

1 Cor. → 2 Cor. 1-9 → Gal. → Rom → 2 Cor. 10-13

5. *Paul's early Corinthian mission.* If I may be pardoned for referring to my own book again, I would add that the argument of *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* has chronological implications for a small part of the problem under discussion. By means of the examination of both the biographical information and the sequence of argument which lies behind 1 Corinthians, the following sequence of letters is proposed:<sup>30</sup>

1 Thess. → P. L. → 1 Cor. → rest of Cor. correspondence

The death of the first few Christians may have called forth from Paul the simple and pastorally oriented statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. A similar statement seems to have been contained in the Previous Letter, as well as an announcement of the 'Collection for the Saints.' Corinthian objection to the notion of bodily resurrection and questions about the Collection – among other items – appear to have evoked 1 Corinthians from Paul. In this sequence there is no room for any of the rest of the Corinthian correspondence, which therefore comes from a later date.

### C. *Synthesis of previous work*

The reader can hardly fail to have noticed the similarities among many of the proposals outlined above concerning the relative sequence of Paul's letters. These similarities suggest the possibility of combining these partial sequences,

27. *Chapters in a Life of Paul*, pp. 47-60.

28. 'Fourteen Years Later': A Note on the Pauline Chronology,' *The Journal of Religion*, 16 (1936), 341-49; and 'The Pauline Chronology,' *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 58 (1939), 15-29.

29. 'The Collection for the Saints,' *Harvard Theological Review*, 43 (1950), 1-29.

30. Cf. *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, pp. 47-58, 231-33, 289-96, *et passim*.

adopting the majority opinion in each case of disagreement. The result is as follows:

Thess. → P. L. → 1 Cor. → Phil. → 2 Cor. 1-9 → Gal. → Rom. → Col. → Eph.

When this synthesis is performed, a surprising fact emerges. There is only *one* point of disagreement among the above scholars – the position of 2 Corinthians 10-13. Some consider it to be the 'severe' letter and place it before 2 Corinthians 1-9. Others consider that the problems discussed in it are not the same as those resolved just prior to the writing of 2 Corinthians 1-9, and they place the letter after Romans. This problem is the only major difference of opinion in the relative sequence given above.

There are two minor points, however, that should be mentioned for completeness. (1) Riddle did place Colossians and Philemon in the same group with the Thessalonian letters, the Previous Letter, and 1 Corinthians, because Colossians and Philemon fail to mention the Judaizing crisis. It seems probable, however, that his index of classification was too rough and that, in any case, it is more to be respected when it deals with the presence of passages relating to the Judaizing problem than when it becomes an argument from silence. (2) The second minor point is the relative sequence of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The usual opinion, based on the Acts narrative, is that 2 Thessalonians, if genuine, was written shortly after 1 Thessalonians. When Acts is set aside, however, there is evidence, in the opinion of a number of scholars, that 2 Thessalonians is genuine and that it was written before 1 Thessalonians.<sup>31</sup>

Although the amount of work on the sequence of Paul's letters and on the development of his thought which is based on the letters alone is relatively small, the unanimity of the results is significant and offers promise. Needless to say, a very great deal of work remains to be done. However, to produce further evidence from the letters which will confirm, modify, and amplify the above skeleton is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it may be interesting to proceed one step further and to add to our composite sequence the visits of Paul to Jerusalem according to the majority opinion of those scholars treated above who have expressed a conviction on the point. The result is as follows:

*Jerusalem visit ('acquaintance')*

1 and 2 Thessalonians

Previous Letter (including 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1)

*Jerusalem visit ('conference'; collection begins)*

1 Corinthians

Philippians

2 Cor. 1-9

Galatians

Romans

(2 Cor. 10-13)

31. For references see *ibid.*, p. 27, n.1.

*Jerusalem visit* (collection delivered; arrest)

Colossians and Philemon

'Ephesians' – if genuine

The reader should remember that a number of scholars place 2 Corinthians 10–13 before 2 Corinthians 1–9. Further, in *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* it is argued that the second visit to Jerusalem took place one position earlier in the above sequence and that the Previous Letter was used to inform the Corinthians about the Collection for the Saints.<sup>32</sup>

There are, of course, a number of similarities between the above sequence and the traditional sequence. Actually, the similarities occur, for the most part, where the evidence in Acts about the dating of the letters in question is rather slight. Acts says nothing really helpful about the sequence of the Corinthian correspondence. Acts does not provide an anchor point for Romans; it is Paul's own statement in Romans 15 that he is on his way back to Jerusalem after having canvassed his churches which leads scholars to date the letter at Acts 20:2b–3a, the point at which Paul sets sail for Jerusalem.<sup>33</sup>

What is new about the sequence synthesized above is the positions assigned to Philippians and Galatians, both of which have been affected by the use of Acts as the basis for determining their relationships to the other letters. That the Thessalonian letters have traditionally been put early and that Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians have been dated late on the basis of Acts is, I believe, a happy accident, although it must be said that in the case of the former the accident is not altogether happy. Acts makes it appear – wrongly, in my opinion<sup>34</sup> – that 1 Thessalonians was written almost immediately after Paul's initial visit to Thessalonica. As a result of this dating, 2 Thessalonians is left dangling. It is considered either a puzzling addendum to 1 Thessalonians or not authentic. However, the links between 1 Thessalonians and Acts 17–18 are exceedingly tenuous and do not warrant the firmness with which Acts has been used to date this letter early in the

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 240–70.

33. J. R. Richards, who has a high regard for the accuracy of Acts but who puts a unique interpretation on Rom. 15:23–28, is not prevented by any evidence in Acts from dating Romans at Acts 19:21–22 and shortly before the writing of 1 Corinthians ('Romans and I Corinthians: Their Chronological Relationship and Comparative Dates,' *New Testament Studies*, 13 [1966/67], 14–30). The very fact that Acts affords no evidence concerning his problem means that he has had to concentrate on the evidence of the letters. He belongs by definition, therefore, to the group of scholars we are discussing. However, among them he is an anomaly. He deals neither with the work of other scholars in this area nor with the obvious difficulties to his theory. His use of evidence is unsystematic and highly selective. For example, without reference to statistical linguistics he begins by asserting that it 'cannot be regarded as purely fortuitous and devoid of significance' that there are 45 words peculiar to Romans and 1 Corinthians but only 22 peculiar to the latter and 2 Corinthians (p. 15). R. Morgenthaler, *Statistik des Neutestamentlichen Wortschatzes* (Zürich: Gotthelf Verlag, 1958), p. 173, gives these figures as 47 and 27 respectively, but, more significantly, also notes that there are 44 words peculiar to Romans and 2 Corinthians, a letter which is only about two-thirds the length of 1 Corinthians.

34. See *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, pp. 25–27.

letters sequence. Neither this dating nor the assignment of all the Imprisonment letters to the only period of lengthy imprisonments described by Acts can be considered a demonstration of good historical method.

#### *D. Conclusions*

We conclude, therefore, that the various studies which have attacked the problem of the sequence of Paul's letters and of distinguishing movement in Paul's thought point surprisingly well in a single direction, especially when we consider that it was accomplished in spite of the assumption on the part of many of these scholars that they were working within the framework provided by the narrative of Acts.

Clearly, what is needed is a thorough investigation of all the various sorts of evidence to be found in the letters alone which have value in establishing the probable original sequence of Paul's letters. The rapid survey given above of the work that has been done already suggests the huge diversity of bits of evidence and types of historical argument which are involved in this interesting problem. It is necessary to consider Paul's theological ideas, the structure of his arguments, the literary relationship of sections of his letters to one another, his use of vocabulary, probably the number of *kaî*'s per page, the geography of the area, what the weather was likely to be like in the Aegean Sea in winter, who Paul's travelling companions were, etc. — the list is almost endless. It covers matters in both the external and internal spheres of Paul's career. In fact, the relating of these two spheres is one of the principal tasks and methods of this approach.

What we are suggesting is the application of an historicism which is as radical as we can make it to the understanding of Paul's letters. This historical approach means — to put the matter briefly — (a) that the primary documents must take priority over the secondary sources, priority not just of weight but priority in the order in which they are consulted; (b) that the external and internal sides of Paul's life must be examined at the same time, if we are to aim at the biographer's goal of understanding how circumstances affected a man and how the man affected his circumstances; and (c) that Paul's letters must be used sequentially, that is, in sequential relationship to one another and to the sequence of events in which they were created.<sup>35</sup>

To pursue the goal of recovering the original sequence of Paul's letters is to take an important step in the direction of allowing Pauline chronology to inform and to be informed by Pauline theology.

35. For a fuller discussion of these points see my article, 'Pauline Chronology and Pauline Theology.'