

BIBLE 101 — Week 14

Letters Written to Real Churches with Real Problems

Scripture Focus: Galatians 1:6 · Romans 8:28–29 · 1 Corinthians 11

KEY VOCABULARY — scan this before you watch

Term	What It Means
Occasional Documents	Letters written on the fly in response to specific _____ — urgent problems, confusing questions, or full-blown crises
Reconstruct the Situation	Playing detective to figure out the original _____ that made the author write the letter in the first place
Logical Connectors	Signpost words like "therefore," "so," "for," and "because" that hold the author's _____ together
Culturally Bound vs. Universal	The key question: Is this instruction a specific cultural _____, or is it expressing a timeless principle?

I. THE MASTER KEY: READING SOMEONE ELSE'S MAIL

When you open a letter to the Corinthians or Galatians, you're literally listening in on one half of a 2,000-year-old _____.

You're reading someone else's _____ — mail that was never addressed to you, but was saved because it held something vital.

We have the apostles' _____. To really understand them, we have to become detectives and reconstruct the original situation.

II. THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING CONTEXT

Key term: Nearly all NT letters are **occasional** documents — written in response to specific occasions, not planned as a book _____.

	SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY	OCCASIONAL LETTER
Asks ...	"What is _____ about God?"	"What do we do about this _____ right now?"
Written by ...	A theologian in a quiet _____	A pastor putting out a _____
Goal	Broad, comprehensive _____	Urgent, specific _____

What kinds of fires?

- A church sent a scroll with a list of _____ they were arguing about
- False _____ were spreading a distorted version of the gospel

- Serious moral problems or deep, painful _____ that needed a pastor's touch

III. THE DETECTIVE'S TOOLKIT: READING THE LETTER'S STRUCTURE

SECTION	WHAT IT TELLS YOU	DETECTIVE CLUE
Greeting	Who is writing and with what _____	Sets the tone and relationship
Thanksgiving	Thanks God for the church	Often drops huge _____ about the main theme or problem
Body	Tackles the issues _____	The core argument and teaching
Exhortation	Here's how your _____ needs to change	Practical application of the teaching

Example — Galatians:

Paul is so alarmed that he completely _____ his normal thanksgiving section.

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel."

— Galatians 1:6 (ESV)

The missing thanksgiving is a massive _____ — like getting a text from a friend that just says "Call me now." The total lack of small talk tells you something is seriously wrong.

IV. FOLLOWING THE ARGUMENT (NOT PICKING FORTUNE COOKIES)

Stop yanking out isolated verses — start tracing the author's logical _____ from beginning to end.

The secret: Look for logical connectors — words like **therefore**, **so**, **for**, and **because**.

When you see "therefore," always ask: What is this _____ for?

Example — Romans 8:28

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

— Romans 8:28 (ESV)

- **Common reading:** A standalone promise that everything in life will turn out _____
- **In-context reading:** The climax of _____ chapters about sin, grace, and life in the Spirit
- Not about a happy, comfortable life — but that God can use even our worst _____ for the ultimate good
- Paul defines that "good" as being made to look more like _____ (v. 29)

II PAUSE & REFLECT

Think about Romans 8:28. How does reading it as the climax of an eight-chapter argument change its meaning compared to reading it as a standalone promise?

V. BRIDGING THE GAP: CULTURAL vs. UNIVERSAL

The one question to ask every time:

Is this specific instruction a culturally bound _____, or is it expressing a timeless universal principle?

Example — Head coverings (1 Corinthians 11):

- **Cultural application:** Women in first-century Corinth wearing a head _____ during worship
- **Universal principle:** Honoring God-given _____ and showing reverence in worship

Our job: Grab the timeless principle and ask, "How do we live this out _____ in our own culture today?"

VI. THE FIVE-QUESTION CHECKLIST

1. Who _____ this letter?
2. To _____ was it written?
3. _____ was it written? What was the big problem (the occasion)?
4. What is the author's main _____ from start to finish?
5. Is this specific command a _____ thing or a universal principle for all time?

Pro tip: Try reading entire letters in one _____. Pick a short one to start — Galatians or Philemon (15–20 minutes).

For the first time, you'll feel the author's _____, follow the flow of their logic, and grasp the main point in a way that verse-by-verse reading never allows.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean that the epistles are 'occasional documents'? Why is it so important to reconstruct the original situation before applying the teaching?

2. Pick one of Paul's letters and read the greeting and thanksgiving sections. What clues can you find about the occasion and the main problem he's addressing?

3. Think of a verse from an epistle that you've always read as a standalone quote. What changes when you trace the author's argument leading up to it?
