

In Galatians the primary doctrine of justification by faith, so clearly presented in Romans and so greatly stressed in the Corinthian epistles, is again in view, but from a different angle. False teachers had led the Galatians to think that simple faith in the salvation that God provides through Christ is not enough, and that they must add ceremonies as a means of salvation. Paul corrects their false ideas and reemphasizes the necessity of recognizing that salvation results from Christ's finished work alone. Forms and ceremonies may be valuable teaching instruments, but in themselves they are of no value for salvation.

The next three epistles form a similar group, in which the apostle explains some of the mysteries of life in the heavenlies with Christ. Ephesians gives a clear presentation of these doctrines, explaining some of the divine mysteries behind God's control of the universe and emphasizing the Christian's progress. In Philippians the apostle reproves those whose actions are in error at this point. In Colossians he corrects the false ideas of those who endeavor to introduce into the understanding of the Christian life the idea of principalities and powers as coming between the believer and God. Thus the second group of epistles has a distinct progress similar to that of the first group.

In a third group, composed of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, which were among the first epistles written, Paul deals with an additional phase of Christian knowledge: that of eschatology--God's plan for the ending of the present age. In 1 Thessalonians the doctrine is clearly presented. In 2 Thessalonians misunderstandings are corrected.

The next group of Paul's letters is called "the pastoral epistles," since they contain Paul's instructions for the guidance of the churches in their development and organization.

In the providence of God these various letters have been arranged in such a way as to present a logical progress of thought. Much can be learned by studying isolated verses or stressing the teaching of individual chapters, but an overview can help one to draw it all together and to reach a clearer understanding of God's purpose as He led His great apostle to write these important parts of the Bible.