

## *Types of Letters and Their Different Functions*

Handbooks from the Greco-Roman world include instructions for writing different types of letters to accomplish different goals.

- *friendship*—shares memories and provides news between friends who are separated
- *prayer*—expresses the content of prayers said on the recipient's behalf
- *congratulations*—applauds the recipient for some accomplishment or honor
- *consolation*—expresses sympathy for those who have experienced suffering or loss
- *recommendation*—testifies to someone's abilities and/or character
- *inquiry*—requests information from the recipient
- *response*—responds to a letter of inquiry by supplying requested information
- *report*—informs the recipient of news that the sender deems relevant
- *supplication*—asks the recipient for some sort of favor
- *thanks*—expresses gratitude for a favor that has been promised or performed
- *excuse*—explains why the sender will not be able to do something that the recipient requested
- *didactic*—teaches the recipient about some topic
- *advice*—recommends one course of action over another
- *encouragement*—urges the recipient to be bold in pursuing some course of action
- *exhortation*—urges the recipient to avoid immorality and exhibit virtuous behavior
- *accusation*—claims that the recipient has an improper attitude or behavior
- *threat*—informs the recipient of consequences for behavior (especially if it continues)
- *defense*—seeks to defuse charges made against the sender by recipient or someone else
- *praise*—commends the recipient for exemplary behavior

The New Testament letters are longer than the letters that exemplify one or another of these types (but see Acts 15:23–29; 23:26–30). They usually are thought to represent “mixed types” for which there was no specific category in the handbooks. Still, all the New Testament letters incorporate aspects of these various letter types into their contents, as they seek to accomplish the various functions that those types were intended to serve.