

Why I Believe All The New Testament Books Are Authentic¹

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explain why I believe *all* the books of the New Testament are authentic.

As always, my paper is written for believers; those whose minds are already opened to “*understand the Scriptures*” (Luke 24:45). As Wenham once wrote, “The work is addressed to Christians — to those who believe that Jesus was God incarnate, the supreme revelation of God. It is addressed furthermore to Christians who believe that...the Gospels give a substantially true account of the Jesus of history.”²

Overview

It has become common practice among contemporary New Testament scholars to cast judgment upon the writings of the New Testament and declare which books are and are not authentic. Among the New Testament, the ten books often cited as being inauthentic are: Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, James, 1 and 2 Peter and Jude.³

General Points

Before starting, I want to be clear that I am defining the “early Church” as the church as it existed prior to A.D. 380 when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.⁴ This is an important distinction because prior to 380, if someone wanted to join the church, they had to be *thoroughly committed* to the Christian faith since the church was under the constant threat of persecution.

Prior to Constantine’s conversion, the church consisted of convinced believers. Now many came who were politically ambitious, religiously disinterested, and still half-rooted in paganism. This threatened to produce not only shallowness and permeation by pagan superstitions but also the secularization and misuse of religion for political purposes.⁵

- Bruce Shelley

To believe that several New Testament books are inauthentic is to also believe that the church missed this for 1800 years. “It’s not impossible, of course, but the church has

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

² Wenham, John, *Christ and the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Eugene, OR: WIPF & Stock, 2009), p. 13.

³ See Linnemann, Eta, *Biblical Criticism on Trial: How Scientific is ‘Scientific Theology’?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), p. 101.

⁴ See Shelley, Bruce, *Church History in Plain Language*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 96.

⁵ *Ibid.*

had some brilliant scholars and pretty spiritual saints throughout its history, so if someone is going to claim that all of these people missed something...he needs to make a very strong case that this is so. (It should also take a tremendous amount of evidence to come to believe that God would let His church exist in fundamental error throughout the centuries...)."6 In my thirty years of research, I have yet to see this "tremendous amount of evidence."

Consider too that the church was willing to be imprisoned, tortured, and even executed for the sake of the *entire* New Testament and so they would have had to have been very certain that *all* of the books were authentic. This was not just an academic exercise for the early church; their very lives depended on the outcome of their decision. This is a point often overlooked when discussing the canon of the New Testament.

When the imperial police knocked at the door and demanded of Christians that they surrender their sacred books, it became a matter of conscience in deciding whether one could hand over the Gospel of John as well as, say, the Gospel of Thomas without incurring the guilt of sacrilege. In such an existential moment most Christians would naturally be careful to determine on solid grounds precisely which were the books for adherence to which they were prepared to suffer...The punishment inflicted for resistance was imprisonment, torture, and, in some cases, death.⁷

- Bruce Metzger

Does it really make sense that Christians (who knew they could be hauled into prison, tortured, and executed for their beliefs) took less care to ensure that all the New Testament books were authentic than contemporary scholars (who knew they wouldn't face a single act of persecution for their beliefs)?

To get around this thorny problem that the early church accepted the authenticity of the *entire* New Testament, scholars had to paint the church fathers as a collection of buffoons who didn't think critically about the text of the New Testament. And while it's true that not all the early fathers engaged in textual issues, this was not true for every church father. As Metzger once noted, those who generally believe the early church fathers were "uncritical" do so without understanding how frequently the fathers engaged in criticism of the biblical text.⁸ Black calls attention to the scholarship, intelligence, and integrity of the early church fathers noting that Clement of Alexandria reviewed manuscripts from all over the Roman Empire as part of his studies.⁹ Metzger lauds

⁶ Boyd, Gregory, *Letters from a Skeptic* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1994), p. 150.

⁷ Metzger, Bruce, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 106-107.

⁸ See Metzger, Bruce, *New Testament Studies: Philological, Versional, and Patristic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), p. 189.

⁹ Black, David Alan, *Why Four Gospels?: The Historical Origins of the Gospels* (Gonzales, FL: Energion Publications, 2010), p. 33, n 10.

Origen's qualities as a scholar and skill as an exegete¹⁰ and believes his work on the text of the Bible was the most exceptional, not just for his period, but for any age.¹¹

Another problem for those advocating that several NT books are inauthentic, is that Paul's letters were recognized as authoritative and circulated to be read in churches even during his own lifetime (Gal. 1:2; Col. 4:16; 1 Th. 5:27; 2 Th. 3:14)!¹² This is significant because according to Kruger, having Paul's letters read in church "parallels the Jewish practice of reading portions of the Old Testament Scripture aloud in the public worship of the synagogue."¹³ Obviously, Paul's epistles had to be viewed as authoritative if they were to be read in church. Even Peter referred to Paul's writing as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:16).

And we shouldn't be surprised that Paul's works were immediately recognized as authoritative since we are told that he was so full of the Holy Spirit that just touching someone with his garments could heal them and cast out demons (Acts 19:11-12). The same was true for Peter. Not only was he able to heal the lame (Acts 3:1-9) but he also raised Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:36-42)! In fact, the Scriptures tell us that *all* the apostles possessed the power to perform miraculous feats (Acts 5:12). If the apostles were performing "*many signs and wonders*" (Acts 5:12) then surely the church didn't need to wait until A.D. 367¹⁴ to recognize their writings as inspired; they were immediately recognized as such.¹⁵

That the New Testament writings were recognized as authoritative very early on is a problem for those advocating that some books were inauthentic for it forces us to believe that after the apostles died, someone was able to convince the church that several books by the apostles went unnoticed for decades and that the church reviewed these new letters from Peter, Paul, James, and Jude and overlooked all the obvious evidence to the contrary and decided they were authentic. In other words, the church, which had access to information now lost and who would have to stake their lives on their decision, missed everything the contemporary scholars found and included them in the canon anyway. A most improbable scenario indeed.

¹⁰ See Metzger, Bruce, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 151.

¹¹ See Metzger, Bruce, *New Testament Studies: Philological, Versional, and Patristic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), p. 189.

¹² Metzger, Bruce, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 4.

¹³ Kruger, Michael, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), p. 126.

¹⁴ In A.D. 367, Athanasius "was the first to include all twenty-seven New Testament books into one canon list...He did not invent this list. He compiled a complete list of books that were *already* recognized as canonical." For example, Origen had produced an identical list around A.D. 250. See Meade, John, "Myths About Canon: What the Codex Can and Cannot Tell Us," from *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*, Elijah Hixson and Peter Gurry eds. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), pp. 254, 276.

¹⁵ This is what Kruger calls the "ontological definition" of canon in which books were recognized as authoritative "as soon as the New Testament books were written." See Kruger, Michael, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), p. 40.

If it be argued that the Church knew these works were pseudonymous yet still admitted them into the canon (perhaps on the basis of some benefit to believers), this argument fails for two reasons. First, the apostles themselves denounced the practice of forgery. “In 2 Thess. 2:2 Paul himself condemns forged letters in his name.”¹⁶ Several times Paul concluded his letter by saying that it was written in his own hand (1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17). And those times when he used an amanuensis,¹⁷ this was made clear as in Rom. 16:22. For all the other epistles¹⁸, the author of the work is clearly stated up front (i.e., 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1, etc.). If pseudonymity was an accepted practice, it’s hard to explain why the apostles went out of their way to ensure that the reader knew who wrote the book.

Secondly, believing the Church would knowingly admit pseudonymous works into the canon runs counter to everything we know regarding how the Church viewed forgeries. As Kruger noted, “Tertullian actually removed the author of *The Acts of Paul* and *Thecla* from his position as a presbyter for passing off his work under Paul’s name”¹⁹ because in Tertullian’s words, the person had put forth “writings that wrongly go under Paul’s name.”²⁰ Eusebius reports that Serapion rejected works which falsely claimed to be written by an apostle.²¹ Even Bart Ehrman (an avowed agnostic/atheist) admits, “Indeed, despite its common occurrence, forgery was almost universally condemned by ancient authors.”²² Kruger summed things up well when we wrote, “In light of these considerations, those who continue to insist that a document can be both a known pseudepigraphic work and legitimately in the canon seem to be out of step with the early church fathers themselves.”²³

Based on the above, it’s clear the church did not knowingly allow pseudonymous works into the canon. The question must then be asked, “Did the church *unknowingly* admit inauthentic works into the canon?” The answer to this question is a resounding “No!” for two reasons. First, we have an unbroken line of descent from Irenaeus right back to the apostle John²⁴ which also means we have an unbroken connection from the writing of the New Testament to the early church fathers. If the early church had interaction with the apostle John, this renders the theory that the church allowed inauthentic books into the canon untenable. It should also not be forgotten that the apostle John did not die until around A.D. 100 which means he would have been alive during the composition of the entire New Testament. Are we really to believe that the church accepted books into the New Testament canon long after the apostle John had passed away?

¹⁶ Kruger, Michael, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), p. 190 n. 141.

¹⁷ An amanuensis is one who takes dictation.

¹⁸ Obviously excluding Hebrews whose authorship is unknown.

¹⁹ Kruger, Michael, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” *JETS* (42.4), December 1999, p. 647.

²⁰ Tertullian, *On Baptism* 17.

²¹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.12.2 as cited in Kruger, Michael, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), p. 190 n. 141.

²² Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 323.

²³ Kruger, Michael, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” *JETS* (42.4), December 1999, p. 648.

²⁴ “In [Polycarp’s] youth, he was mentored by the apostle John himself, and in turn, during his later years, he mentored a young Irenaeus, the future bishop of Lyons.” Kruger, Michael, *Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), p. 47.

Second, since Jesus told us He sent the Holy Spirit to guide His apostles “*into all the truth*” (John 16:13), there’s no reason to believe that this same Holy Spirit suddenly abandoned the church the moment the last sentence of the New Testament was completed. If the Holy Spirit guided Jesus’ apostles during the composition of the New Testament, then surely He would have guided the Church in the recognition of those same books. As Evans once wrote, “It seems highly plausible, then, that if God is going to see that an authorized revelation is given, he will also see that this revelation is recognized.”²⁵ This ties in directly to what I stated earlier regarding the Church prior to A.D. 380. At that time, the church was still open to the voice and calling of the Holy Spirit and could correctly discern which books were and were not inspired. To suggest books that falsely claimed to be written by the apostles were incorrectly admitted into the New Testament canon is to declare our Lord and Savior a liar when He said the Holy Spirit would lead the Church into all truth (John 14:18, 26; 15:26; 16:13-14).

Arguments for Inauthenticity

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of all the specific arguments in favor of inauthenticity, so in this section I will present three examples to give the reader a flavor for the quality of the arguments. Those who wish to learn more can refer to the list of sources at the end of this paper.

Example 1: Word Lists Used to Support Claims of Inauthenticity

Scholars develop arbitrary lists of words and phrases (that are claimed to be authentic Pauline expressions) and any work that does not match these lists must not have been written by Paul. As an example, scholars call attention to the fact that there are words and phrases found in Ephesians that are not found in Paul’s other authentic letters.²⁶ But if this is true, why do scholars accept Galatians even though it contains almost the same percentage of unique words as Ephesians?²⁷ It’s completely illogical to expect that all of Paul’s letters would use the same vocabulary when it’s clear he was writing to different audiences.

The thirteen letters bearing Paul’s name were addressed to a similar variety of individuals and groups. Compare, for example, the letters to the Corinthians with the letters to Timothy and Titus [i.e., the pastoral epistles]. Most of the Corinthian Christians were poorly educated and economically deprived. Some would be slaves, some would be illiterate. When he preached to them, he ‘did not use big words and great learning’ (1 Corinthians 2:1), and the same would be true when he wrote them a letter. Timothy and Titus, on the other hand, had probably had a good education. It therefore comes as no surprise to find a very limited

²⁵ Evans, Stephen, “Canonicity, Apostolicity, and Biblical Authority: Some Kierkegaardian Reflections,” in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Craig Bartholomew, Robin Perry, and Scott Hahn (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006), p. 155 as cited in Kruger, Michael, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), p. 40 n. 54.

²⁶ Guthrie, Donald, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1990), p. 500.

²⁷ According to Linnemann, 6.65% of Galatians contains words not found elsewhere in the New Testament (*Hapax legomena*) while the percentage of unique words found in Ephesians is 7.36%. See Linnemann, Eta, *Biblical Criticism on Trial: How Scientific is ‘Scientific Theology’?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001), p. 104.

vocabulary in the Corinthian letters, and a much wider and more educated vocabulary in the letters to Timothy and Titus. *What is surprising is the assumption that is sometimes made that this difference in vocabulary indicates, not a difference in readership, but a difference in authorship.*²⁸

- David Hall

Example 2: Lack of Pauline Style as an Argument for Inauthenticity

It is argued by scholars that the style of Ephesians does not match that of other authentic Pauline letters.²⁹ But presumably one does not need an advanced degree in rhetoric to see the subjectivity of this argument. Cannot the same person write with different styles? Might a person's mood or environment dictate to some extent their style? As Kruger once wrote, "It seems there are many factors that could explain such stylistic differences other than a pseudonymous author, such as the author writing at a different time in his life, under different circumstances [i.e., while in prison], and with different goals and different audiences...Moreover, there is always the possibility that authors used an amanuensis at some points [Rom. 16:22] and not others [1 Cor. 16:21]—which could be an additional explanation of stylistic differences."³⁰

Example 3: Peter Didn't Repeat Himself

One reason scholars believe 2 Peter is inauthentic is because it does not discuss the same topics as in 1 Peter. Scholars have pointed to the fact that "many of the major themes in 1 Peter do not occur at all in 2 Peter (e.g., the cross, resurrection, ascension, baptism, prayer)"³¹ and thus 2 Peter could not have been written by the apostle Peter. But why should it be expected that Peter would write two letters covering the same topics? Most rational people would expect just the opposite. This is an example of what Hall *facetiously* calls, the "law of nonmention" by which critical scholars believe "no book of the New Testament was written by the author whose name it bears unless it mentions all the ideas we should expect that author to mention."³² This is, of course, ludicrous. We don't expect modern preachers to "refer to every clause in the Nicene Creed in every sermon they preach."³³ Likewise, we should not expect Peter to discuss every doctrine in each of his letters.

Consider too that if 2 Peter did repeat the same topics from 1 Peter, critics would still declare 2 Peter inauthentic for in this case, they would argue that it wouldn't make sense for Peter to repeat what he wrote in 1 Peter. Like a Soviet-style show trial, once the verdict has been reached, it is only a matter of finding the crime. 2 Peter was declared guilty of being inauthentic and no amount of evidence (or reason) can convince critical scholars otherwise.

²⁸ Hall, David, *The Seven Pillories of Wisdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990), pp. 94-95. Emphasis mine.

²⁹ Guthrie, Donald, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1990), p. 500.

³⁰ Kruger, Michael, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), pp. 192-193.

³¹ Guthrie, Donald, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1990), p. 818.

³² Hall, David, *The Seven Pillories of Wisdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990), p. 56.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

I could go on but these three examples are sufficient to show that the arguments for inauthenticity are weak at best and, as Hall once noted, “It is difficult to take such arguments seriously.”³⁴ They prove that the results of higher criticism are not based on “objective tests” but are the result of the scholar’s own “presuppositions and prejudices.”³⁵

Using grotesque literary methods which would lead immediately to absurd results if they were ever applied to the work of a poet or a theologian—say a Goethe, or Barth—claims of inauthenticity are established for the pastoral letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), Ephesians, and Colossians. These claims are then, without careful examination, passed on from one generation of theologians to the next.³⁶

- Eta Linnemann

Summary

In this paper, I’ve presented my thoughts on why I accept the authenticity for all of the New Testament books but each person must make up their own mind. And while it can sometimes seem that the scholars are unanimous in their claim that several books were not written by the canonical authors, it should also be kept in mind that there are so many scholars who uphold the authenticity of *all* the New Testament writings that “one wonders whether the critical consensus can really be called a ‘consensus’ in the first place.”³⁷

It’s called “faith” for a reason for we can’t know any of this with certainty so each person must decide for themselves in whom they will trust. Will they put their trust in the early church which was separated from these events by only a few hundred years and who were willing to be tortured and killed for their faith or will they put their trust in contemporary scholars (many of whom are not even believers) who are separated from these events by thousands of years and who won’t face a single act of persecution for their beliefs? I’m comfortable trusting that the early church knew which books were and were not authentic.

It should also be remembered how often our “scholars” have been wrong in the past. The “scholars” told us that Moses didn’t write the Pentateuch because writing hadn’t been invented yet. And then it was discovered that writing had been around centuries prior to the birth of Abraham as confirmed by the British Assyriologist A. H. Sayce.³⁸ We were told by the “scholars” that Luke was wrong when he wrote that Quirinius was

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

³⁵ Hooker, Morna, “On Using the Wrong Tool,” *Theology* 35 (1972): 581 as cited in Hall, David, *The Seven Pillories of Wisdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990), p. 78.

³⁶ Linnemann, Eta, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), p. 85.

³⁷ Kruger, Michael, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), p. 191.

³⁸ See Sayce, A. H., *Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1904), pp. 28-29 as cited in McDowell, Josh, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict Volume II* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), p. 69.

governor of Syria at the time of Jesus' birth. But then an inscription was found in Antioch verifying Luke's account.³⁹

Sadly, it is our Christian colleges and seminaries that continue to propagate these theories of inauthenticity. What kind of leaders are these institutions producing? Who is feeding God's sheep when the "shepherds" are offering only stones instead of bread (Matt. 4:3-4)?

A theology student who has not yet died to the need for the recognition of men stands under the same pressure. Small wonder, then, that many believing theology students soon have grave difficulties in their faith. Often they drift away from the faith without realizing it themselves...Lines are drawn through parts of God's Word. Some of what it says is no longer believed, and its power is accordingly no longer experienced as it was before. 'Paul is not the source of the pastoral epistles,' one learns. 'The author of the Gospel of John is, of course, not the son of Zebedee, the disciple of Jesus.' 'The Pentateuch was not written by Moses but compiled from various sources.' Anybody who has not learned all this by the sixth semester is regarded with pity, if not scorn, and thus the vineyard is ruined by the little foxes as in Song of Solomon 2:15. It all looks so harmless: These are only trifles; what is at stake is not decisive for the faith. But the authority of God's Word is thereby called in question. It loses its binding character, as becomes swiftly evident with respect to those passages which make us uncomfortable. Let us make no mistake; even a mouse hole can endanger a dike. That becomes clear when a storm brings high water.⁴⁰

- Eta Linnemann

*Forever, O LORD,
Your word is settled in heaven. (Psalm 119:89)*

Further Reading

- Green, E. M. B., *2 Peter Reconsidered* (London: Tyndale, 1960).
- Guthrie, Donald, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1990).
- Hall, David, *The Seven Pillories of Wisdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1990).
- Kruger, Michael, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).
- Kruger, Michael, "The Authenticity of 2 Peter," *JETS* (42.4), December 1999.
- Linnemann, Eta, *Biblical Criticism on Trial: How Scientific is 'Scientific Theology'?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001).
- Linnemann, Eta, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990).
- Schrader, Carl William, "The Authenticity of Ephesians" (1946). *Bachelor of Divinity*. 190. <https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv/190>.
<https://scholar.csl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1189&context=bdiv>
- Van Roon, A., *The Authenticity of Ephesians* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974).

³⁹ See McDowell, Josh, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict Volume II* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), p. 71.

⁴⁰ Linnemann, Eta, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), p. 88.