

Vicar's Voice –Yikes! Not All the Books of the Bible were written by those claimed as authors!

I am often asked when I have stated that there are only seven true Epistles by Paul “why so?” Here is a snapshot of the current research on the subject. I am indebted to Dr. Keith Giles for his scholarship as well as the work of my friend, the late Dr. Marcus Borg for his opening of my eyes in this area.

The New Testament is filled with epistles that were not written by Paul or Peter. These are called “*Pseudepigrapha*” because, like other fake scriptures circulated in the late second and third centuries, they were not authored by the Apostle whose name appears on it.

The textbook definition of Pseudepigrapha is: “*Spurious or pseudonymous writings ascribed to various biblical patriarchs and prophets but composed within approximately 200 years of the birth of Jesus Christ.*”

In other words, the New Testament you're holding contains “scriptures” that are about as reliable as The Gospel of Thomas, The Epistle of Barnabus, or The Book of Enoch [which the New Testament book of Jude quotes, by the way].

Sorry to break it to you like this, but there was no other way.

You need to know the truth.

So, which books of the New Testament are Pseudepigrapha and how did they get in there?

Great questions! Let's take the first one:

Several letters bearing Paul's name are disputed among scholars, namely:

- Ephesians
- Colossians
- 2 Thessalonians
- 1 Timothy
- 2 Timothy
- Titus

Scholars are sharply divided on whether or not Colossians and 2 Thessalonians are genuine, but when it comes to Ephesians and the so-called “Pastoral Epistles” [that would be 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus] most critical scholars have no trouble labeling them as pseudepigraphical works.

I know. It's hard to take. Breathe deep. Are you ready for more? No one knows who wrote either 1 Peter or 2 Peter, but the one thing every scholar agrees on is this: It wasn't the Apostle Peter. Ouch! But, the good news is that we do have seven undisputed letters from Paul that were accepted and included in nearly every early Christian canon, including the first by Marcion of Sinope. He collected readings within a decade after the fall of the temple, which led to the Christian house churches and writings. St. Paul died in 54 AD.

Those are:

- Romans
- First Corinthians

- Second Corinthians
- Galatians
- Philippians
- First Thessalonians
- Philemon

“How did these fake letters from Peter and Paul end up in our Bibles?” Well, that’s easy: Because the Christians who decided which books were in or out of the Canon – around 400 AD – didn’t make their decisions using textual criticism. Usually, the decision was made by consensus, or based on opinions.

In fact, in some cases, they just prayed and waited for God to move the scrolls that were not authentic on to the floor. [Nope. I’m not making that up]. Still other decisions about the Canon, like the Council of Trent [1546] were nearly too close to call, with 24 yea, 15 nay and 16 abstaining.

Maybe a better question is: “Why do some Bible scholars today doubt six letters of Paul and the two by Peter?” This could take a long time. So, if you’re really interested in the gory details, I’d recommend “Googling” “Disputed Letters of Paul” or “Peter” and start heading down the rabbit hole.

For the rest of you, here’s the short answer:

Summary of reasons to [doubt Pauline authorship of Ephesians](#):

- The language and style are different. Ephesians contains 40 new words, e.g. 1:3 “heavenly places”; “family, or fatherhood” (3:15). 1:19 has four different words for “power”
- Ephesians and Colossians use a different word for “reconcile” from Paul’s word (Col 1:20, 22; Eph 2:16).
- Ephesians is similar to Colossians at many places. Eph has 155 verses, 73 of which are similar to ones from Col: e.g. Eph 4:1-2 ≈ Col 3:12-13, Eph 5:19-20 ≈ Col 3:16-17, Eph 6:21-22 ≈ Col 4:7-8.
- Ephesians takes many key ideas from Colossians. Wisdom, mystery. The word of truth. Gospel of salvation. Saints of God.
- Ephesians also refers to most of the other letters of Paul. In many ways it seems like a summary of Paul’s ideas, written by a disciple of his, and brought up to date for the Church of his own time.
- Metaphors, or illustrations in Paul are turned into actual objective realities in Ephesians (and sometimes in Colossians also). E.g. faith, gospel, word of God, reconciliation, salvation, human resurrection and glorification, the Church as the Body of Christ, Minister, Saints of God.
- Ephesians shows that the Church is becoming an advanced and powerful universal institution (rather like the Church today). In Paul’s time there was no universal Church in that sense, but only informal gatherings of individual believing communities.
- Ephesians contains no mention of charismatic gifts.
- Ephesians shows Jesus acting on his own account and by his own authority without making explicit that he is acting on God’s behalf and with God’s blessing; in Paul’s other letters, this is more explicit.

Summary of reasons to doubt Pauline authorship of Colossians:

- The basis for the early objection was that the letter aimed at refuting [Gnosticism](#), a heresy which had not reached its ascendancy until the early 2nd century.
- Another argument centers on differences in style and vocabulary with significant stylistic differences between Colossians and Paul’s other works, such as unusual [genitive](#) constructions.
- The extensive theological development in the epistle compared to other epistles has also led to scepticism concerning Pauline authorship.

Summary of reasons to doubt Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians:

- Much of the dispute concerns the linguistic similarity between 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians. For example, 1 Thess 2:9 is almost identical to 2 Thess 3:8.
- Reflects knowledge of the synoptic gospels, which, according to the current scholarly consensus, had not been written when Paul wrote his epistles.
- Actually makes the specific claim not to be a forgery, which is a typical claim of forgers at the time.
- The eschatology of each letter to the Thessalonians is considerably different.

Summary of reasons to doubt the Pastoral Epistles of Paul:

- Marcion's canon [the earliest of all] does not include them and there is no evidence he had ever heard of them. They were written after Marcion's time and well after both Paul and Peter were dead.
- The vocabulary and phraseology used in the Pastorals is often at variance with that of the other epistles.
- Over 1/3 of the vocabulary is not used anywhere else in the Pauline epistles, and over 1/5 is not used anywhere else in the New Testament, while 2/3 of the non-Pauline vocabulary *are* used by 2nd-century Christian writers.
- It is a harsh reality for a lot of people to begin to realize that the Bible, both Old and New are human products. Good, well meaning but writing for a purpose without any scholarly discipline. Fake news that was inserted to support their point of view did not bother them. Claims of "Divine Direction" are simply that-claims!
- The Bible is an expression of faith in the Divine reality of God and contains knowledge and wisdom for our day but is not a literal recipe book given by God.

I hope this assists you when you are assailed by well meaning folks at the door who tend to condemn and judge you and attempt to shame you. Always remember, Jesus taught us through authentic Apostles that God Loves you and never abandons us as we are always accepted as we are.

Blessings Vicar Dave

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