

## I, Tertius Who Write This: Answering Bart Ehrman's *Forged* Gregg Strawbridge, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract* - This paper will address Ehrman's (*Forged*) claim that most of the New Testament books were forgeries (not written by the ascribed authors). I will argue that the production of ancient literature involved collaborators and aural composition prior to a final manuscript (*autograph*). This is evidenced within the New Testament as well as in external sources. Critical arguments (such as Ehrman's) based upon literary style often fail to take into account the ancient process of literary production and so err in their conclusions about authorship.

### Black Sheep Bart

Dr. Bart Ehrman (B.A. Wheatland, Ph.D. Princeton Divinity, currently at UNC, Chapel Hill) is now the reigning black sheep of the evangelical family, having left the fold (or perhaps shepherd *turned wolf*). His recent publications and debates certainly attack confidence in evangelical truth. As one of his debate partners, Dan Wallace, writes, "His most popular previous books have attacked the reliability of the New Testament (NT) manuscripts as witnesses to the original text (*Misquoting Jesus*), the historicity of the NT (*Jesus, Interrupted*), and the problem of theodicy—how there can be a good God with so much evil in the world (*God's Problem*)."<sup>2</sup>

In his 2011 book, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God – Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are*,<sup>3</sup> Ehrman provides an interesting discussion of early "Christian" literature outside the canon of the NT, cleverly drawing together amusing examples from little known texts like the *Acts of Peter*, the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, etc. The stories and examples are interesting and entertaining. He also relates the stories of modern religious forgeries. But his stage performance of tales has a finale. He does not stop with amusing *pseudepigraphical* stories.<sup>4</sup> He sets his sights on the canonical NT.

He argues forcefully and with admirable wit, that 18 of the 27 NT books are forgeries or false attributions which contain deceitful material. The categories of literary lying (within and without Scripture) include not only forgeries, but fabrications, falsifications, pseudonymy, pseudepigraphy, false attributions and plagiarism.<sup>5</sup> There are a number of helpful and more comprehensive reviews of *Forged* (cited in the notes), however, my purpose is to highlight the emerging study of the *processes of ancient literature production* and interact with what he calls "the secretary hypothesis" (151ff).<sup>6</sup>

### The Old, "He was an Illiterate Peasant" Argument

For NT canonical books, Ehrman repeatedly appeals to the *style (linguistic)* of the writing as proof of forgery. He argues the Apostle Peter could not have written *1 Peter* because, "Peter was an illiterate peasant."

In short, Peter's town was a backwoods Jewish village made up of hand-to-mouth laborers who did not have an education. . . . There was, in fact, probably no school there; if there was a school, he probably didn't attend; if he did attend, it would have been in order to receive rudimentary training in how to read Hebrew. But that almost certainly never happened. Peter was an illiterate peasant. . . . *1 Peter* is written by a highly literate, highly educated, Greek-speaking Christian who is intimately familiar with the Jewish Scriptures in their Greek translation, the Septuagint. This is not Peter. (87) [Peter was an] . . . uneducated, illiterate, Aramaic-speaking fisherman from rural Galilee, and it does not appear to have been produced by a secretary acting on his behalf. (157)

He argues that Jude (the brother of Jesus) could not have written *Jude* because he was a "lower-class Galilean peasant."

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2011/07/book-review-of-bart-d-ehрман's-forged-writing-in-the-name-of-god—why-the-bible's-authors-are-not-who-we-think-they-are/>

<sup>3</sup> *Forged: Writing in the Name of God – Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> He says, "Many early Christian writings are 'pseudonymous,' going under a 'false name.' The more common word for this kind of writing is 'forgery' . . ." (15).

<sup>5</sup> The longer list is what he calls, "Phenomena Related to Forgery" (ch. 7, p. 243).

<sup>6</sup> Ehrman uses vocabulary, setting, dating, content, and style to dispense with many NT canonical books as inauthentic. (See my appendix on refutations relating to content issues.)

Like the lower-class Galilean peasant Peter, the lower-class Galilean peasant Jude could almost certainly not write. Let alone write in Greek. Let alone compose a rhetorically effective letter evidencing detailed knowledge of ancient Jewish texts in Greek. (208-209)

He argues that James (the brother of Jesus)<sup>7</sup> could not have written *James* because (once again) he “was an Aramaic-speaking peasant.”

The historical James, on the other hand, was an Aramaic-speaking peasant from Galilee who almost certainly never learned to read. Or if he did learn to read, it was to read Hebrew. If he ever learned Greek, it would have been as a second language in order to speak it, haltingly no doubt. He never would have gone to school. He never would have become proficient in Greek. He never would have learned how to write, even in his native language, let alone a second tongue. He never would have studied the Greek Old Testament. He never would have taken Greek composition classes. He never would have become skilled in Greek rhetoric. This book was not written by an illiterate Aramaic-speaking Jew. (220)

According to Ehrman, “Most of the apostles were illiterate and could not in fact write (discussed further in Chapter 2). They could not have left an authoritative writing if their souls depended on it” (14). Astoundingly he says, “. . . most of the [real] authors of the New Testament were not part of the Jewish tradition. *They were Gentiles*” (146, emphasis mine).

Though he doesn’t call Paul an illiterate peasant, thankfully, the same appeal to “I know what Paul could *not* have written” persists. On the Pastoral Epistles: “That is one of the reasons scholars from the nineteenth century on have been convinced that Paul did not write the letters. The vocabulary and the writing style are very different from those of the other Pauline letters” (112).

On Ephesians: “For one thing, the writing style is not Paul’s” (125).<sup>8</sup>

On Colossians: “Among other things, the writing style and the contents of the book differ significantly from those in the undisputed letters of Paul . . . this is someone with a different writing style from Paul’s” (128-129).

This line of criticism is very much at the *heart* of his claims of forgery.<sup>9</sup> Ehrman claims to know an awful lot about what Peter, Jude, James and Paul could *not* have known and could *not* have written. How about John, the brother of the (allegedly) illiterate James? It is interesting that Ehrman does not use the “he was an illiterate peasant” argument directly against John’s Gospel or Epistles. Could John not have written the Greek of these books?<sup>10</sup> This fisherman was a “son of thunder” (Mk 3:17), but he became the apostle of love (per an orthodox reading of the NT). Early on he would have “called down fire” on those who disavowed Jesus (Lk 9:54), but he became the John who wrote, “For God so loved the world.” God changes people and endows them with rich gifts. A mountain of scholarship stands against the kind of thinking that the first followers of Jesus never emerged as capable of producing the NT.<sup>11</sup>

## Literature Production in the Modern World

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<sup>7</sup> Ehrman does not consider that James the brother John, son of Zebedee may have been the author which would date the book earlier (prior to 44 A.D.). But if he had considered it, no doubt he too was an “illiterate peasant.” See my 2010 national ETS paper, “The New Perspective on James,” for some arguments for the early date of James by the son of Zebedee. <http://wordmp3.com/files/gs/ETSJames2010.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ehrman says further, “Paul usually writes in short, pointed sentences; the sentences in Ephesians are long and complex. . . . The book also has an inordinate number of words that don’t otherwise occur in Paul’s writings, 116 altogether, well higher than average (50 percent more than Philippians, for example, which is about the same length)” (125).

<sup>9</sup> He begins with style/illiteracy in his debate with Bock: “Was the New Testament Forged? Bart Ehrman vs Darrell Bock” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXSvRkKD3FM>

<sup>10</sup> D.A. Carson observes that Rabbi Akiba was an uneducated shepherd and began rabbinic study at 40, yet he became a leading rabbinic figure. John became a cosmopolitan apostle in world conversant in Koine. Carson notes the Greek of John’s Gospel is competent, but not elegant, semantically enhanced, with the language of the LXX: “This sort of evidence is perfectly consistent with what we know of the background of John the son of Zebedee.” *The Gospel According to John* (Pillar New Testament Commentary, Wm B. Eerdmans, 1990), 75.

<sup>11</sup> See every conservative commentary ever, per Wallace: “E. Earle Ellis, D. A. Carson, Leon Morris, Douglas Moo, Donald Guthrie, Andreas Köstenberger, L. S. Kellum, Charles Quarles, Richard Longenecker, Anthony Kenny, Martin Hengel, Alan Millard, K. J. Neumann, David Dungan, T. L. Wilder, Harold W. Hoehner, or countless other scholars” <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2011/08/book-review-of-bart-d-ehrman-%E2%80%99s-forged-part-3/>

Albert Einstein once observed that science is an extension of ordinary life. Let us reflect upon ordinary life here. Have you ever written with a fountain pen vs a ball point pen? On a yellow pad instead of a computer? On a manual typewriter? By dictation instead of typing or handwriting? Have you used SIRI on your iPhone or used voice-to-text software like DragonSpeak? If you have tried other alternatives in writing you may find that the flow of thought, the choice of words, the verbosity, the style and grammar quite reflect your setting, technique or device. Not that one's *unique voice* is altogether lost, but there are variations which clearly affect style from such means of authorship.

In history, the production of literature has changed in very technological ways. Today we can hardly imagine writing without the aid of a (typing) keyboard. But I made it through my entire undergraduate degree without typing (graduation 1987). I wrote out my papers and assignments long-hand and employed a typist. The situation in the ancient world is somewhat parallel. Some who could read, did not ordinarily "write" the manuscript. For example, Charlemagne (b. 742) could read, but could not write (something he desired to do). In the ancient and especially first century world, there were a multitude of secretaries to record, copy and prepare publications whether one was capable of producing letters beautifully or not.

Not long ago most people wrote longhand. Typist-secretaries created printed documents from dictation, dictaphones, and longhand drafts, even if most journalists made typing part of their own skill-set. Before typewriters were invented in the 1860s, people hand-wrote a draft of the final and gave the "manuscript" off to some kind of artisan printer. Over the years all kinds of technological developments in writing (pens), paper, printing, duplication and publication processes grew, from woodblock printing in about 200 A.D., to movable-type printing which was developed in about 1040 A.D., to the printing press of Gutenberg and later hand-set type prior to electronic means. Before all this, teams of scribes copied manuscripts by hand, which was how the Irish Saved Civilization.<sup>12</sup>

### Literature Production in the Ancient World

Without reflection on, and knowledge of, ancient culture, we may miss the fact that the original manuscripts (*original autographs in ETS-speak*) of ancient authors were almost always the production of more than one person.<sup>13</sup> "We envision Paul writing his letters like we used to write them before email: we plopped down at a desk in a quiet place with pen and paper."<sup>14</sup> We picture St. Paul at a desk with pen and paper. But that is not what happened. Timothy Johnson writes that the "... image of Paul, as a solitary letter writer is inaccurate."<sup>15</sup>

In the case of Paul's classic work, Romans 16:22, makes this clear (as do about 20 other verses in the NT). "I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord."<sup>16</sup> F.F. Bruce says, "Paul regularly employed amanuenses to write his letters, but Tertius is the only one known to us by name."<sup>17</sup> Robert Mounce says, "Verse 22 identifies Tertius as the scribe who wrote down Paul's letter. Scribal assistants were widely used in antiquity."<sup>18</sup> What is said of Paul is certainly true for other NT writers that were allegedly "illiterate, peasants."

All New Testament scholars must admit secretaries/amanuensis. But their use and role as collaborators has often been *minimized*. A well-known study (1968) by Gordon J. Bahr begins, "Paul did not *always* write his letters with his own hand" (emphasis mine).<sup>19</sup> Ehrman says, "There is no doubt that the apostle Paul used a secretary *on occasion*" (134, emphasis mine). Similarly he says, "Even in Paul's letters that are coauthored (almost all of them) he names the others, even though *he probably wrote them himself*" (89, emphasis mine).

<sup>12</sup> See the delightful work of Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Random House, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> In most cases it is literally not their "autograph," as in from "their own hand," or their "John Hancock."

<sup>14</sup> E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 101.

<sup>15</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *First and Second Timothy* in the Anchor Bible Commentary (Double Day: New York, 2001), 58.

<sup>16</sup> The identity of Tertius is interesting. He is known to the Orthodox as martyred Bishop of Iconium. Most commentaries decline to identify him. One intriguing possibility is that the Latin "Tertius" (third) was actually Silas (or Silvanus) since *Shalish* (שָׁלִישׁ) is Hebrew for "third (officer)." See "Tertius" (S. F. Hunter) in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr, General Editor, 1915 edition, OakTree Software, Inc.

<sup>17</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC 6; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 278.

<sup>18</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Romans* (NAC 27; ed. E. Ray Clendenen; Accordance electronic ed. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 281.

<sup>19</sup> "The Subscriptions in the Pauline Letters," Gordon J. Bahr in *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 87, No. 1 (Mar., 1968), pp. 27-41, 27.

## The Secretary Hypothesis

In an amazing admission Ehrman says, “Virtually all of the problems with what I’ve been calling forgeries can be solved if secretaries were heavily involved in the composition of the early Christian writings” (152). But he then explains, “Despite the popularity of this theory, I am going to argue, once again, that it simply does not have credible evidence to back it up” (152).

When Ehrman seeks to address the “secretary hypothesis” he uses only one reference. He calls E. Randolph Richards 1991 book, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul*, “the fullest and most exhaustive” study of this.<sup>20</sup> He interacts with Richards (1991 published doctoral dissertation) and concludes that Richards fails to provide any evidence of secretaries *significantly contributing* to a letter-essay. But Ehrman fails to properly assess the evidence Richards provides, especially since his 1991 work was not the “fullest and most exhaustive” work.

A more extensive work was published by the same author in 2004: E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection*.<sup>21</sup> In this book Richards leaves no stone unturned, looking at a wide range of relevant phenomena: sharpening quills, mixing ink, availability of secretaries (very much a staple in the empire), the hours of scribal work to produce a copy of NT books, the cost of the materials, writing setting, social atmosphere, co-senders, co-authors, the processes of drafts and revisions, etc. For example, he carefully (and precisely) estimates the cost of one copy of Romans at \$2275 (in 2004 terms).

Darrel Bock (who dialogued with Ehrman on this) reports that Richards takes issue with Ehrman’s misuse of his material: “Richards is clear that Josephus used collaborators to help him with his Greek (Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.50). Cicero knew a letter from Pompey had the help of a secretary, Sestius (Att 15:3). Richards cites many such examples in his work.”<sup>22</sup>

Did the secretary simply take dictation as Ehrman thinks? We might ask it this way: Did Paul actually dictate the words, “I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you” (Rom. 16:22) and then Tertius dutifully transcribed them? This seems unlikely. Did Paul speak slowly enough that a secretary could create a final edition in one take? No, there was a Greek shorthand.<sup>23</sup>

Did secretaries add content, style, translation, citations? Richards (2004) (in the work Ehrman does not consider) provides the contextual study, examples and argumentation that secretaries functioned on a continuum from transcriber to composer.<sup>24</sup>

Transcriber ----- Contributor ----- -Composer

Having done substantial primary research, Richards is in a good position to address whether Paul’s writing involved significant contributions from others. He says, “Debate over Pauline authorship or arguments for interpolations (or dislocations), discussion of rhetoric, all need to be informed by a realistic appraisal of first-century letter writing.”<sup>25</sup> The opinion that the secretary may contribute is also espoused by one of the classic Romans Commentaries by Sanday and Headlam.<sup>26</sup>

As Ehrman admits, collaborative contributions have a direct effect on the questions of “forgery” (152). Richards and O’Brien urge, “Many will argue that Paul couldn’t have written certain letters because they don’t have Pauline characteristics--that is, they don’t ‘sound like’ Paul. But if Paul regularly worked with co-authors and secretaries, and if they actively contributed content and turns of phrase, then this might explain why Paul’s letters have variations in style.

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<sup>20</sup> *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> [http://blogs.bible.org/bock/darrell\\_1\\_bock/randolph\\_reynolds\\_on\\_secretaries\\_and\\_ancient\\_letters](http://blogs.bible.org/bock/darrell_1_bock/randolph_reynolds_on_secretaries_and_ancient_letters)

<sup>23</sup> James Dunn refers to Seneca’s comments about, “the shorthand symbols by means of which even a rapidly delivered speech is taken down and the hand is able to keep up with the quickness of the tongue,” Ep 90.25— James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC 38B; Accordance/Thomas Nelson electronic ed. Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 910.

<sup>24</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 80.

<sup>25</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 232.

<sup>26</sup> *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902) p. lx.

They bear the marks of his partners.”<sup>27</sup> They are not alone here. Robert Wall says, “Paul’s employment of different scribes to help with his correspondence may well explain the literary and linguistic differences scholars have observed between his letters.”<sup>28</sup>

Even without a deep investigation of external historical data, consider the direct NT evidence of contributions from others, either as secretaries (implied or expressly named, like Tertius), as well as co-authors, co-senders or those in the social context of the composition.

1. Rom 16:21–23 - “Timothy my fellow worker greets you, and so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. 22 I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord. 23 Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother.”
2. 1 Cor 1:1 - “Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,”
3. 1 Cor 16:19–22 - “The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 20 All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. 21 The greeting is in my own hand — Paul. 22”
4. 2 Cor 1:1 - “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,”
5. Gal 1:1–2 - “Paul, an apostle (not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), 2 and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia.”
6. Gal 6:11–12 - “See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 12”
7. Phil 1:1 - “Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons:”
8. Phil 4:20–22 - “Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.”
9. Col 4:10–14 - “Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas’s cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); 11 and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondsman of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.”
10. Col 4:17–18 - “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.”
11. 1 Th 1:1 - “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.”
12. 2 Th 1:1 - “Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:”
13. 2 Th 3:17 - “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write.”
14. 2 Tim 4:21 - “Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren.”
15. Titus 3:14 - “All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.”
16. Philem 1:1–2 - “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, 2 and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:”
17. Philem 1:23–24 - “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.”
18. 1 Pet 5:11–13 - “Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! 13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.”
19. 2 John 1:12–13 - “The children of your chosen sister greet you.”
20. 3 John 1:13 - “Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.”

The NT writers (especially Paul) engaged many other potential collaborator-co-laborers. Stirewalt writes of Paul, “He surrounded himself with helpers, co-senders named in the salutations, scribes, greeters from the local congregation,

<sup>27</sup> Richards and O’Brian, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, 103.

<sup>28</sup> Robert W. Wall, *Introduction to Epistolary Literature* in the New Interpreter’s Bible Volume X (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 379.

commissioners and visitors from other churches. This group of people provided a kind of voluntary *ad hoc secretariat*.<sup>29</sup> Richards most recent book (2012, co-author), *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes* (2012) argues quite plausibly in light of this that the Bible was written in a collectivist context by collectivist-minded people and is strongly social and communal.<sup>30</sup> This is consonant with the NT's teaching that the people of God are a Body, a community (1Cor. 12-14), living stones (1Pet 2) and to live in service-unity with others (Jn 13-17). In light of this, Ehrman brings very individualistic assumptions in his assessments.

### Auditory Features of Ancient Literature

Ehrman misses the collaborative aspects of composition, but he also misses the strong *aural* component. Desperate to *dumb-down* Peter and John, he says, "As it turns out, there is New Testament evidence about Peter's education level. According to Acts 4:13, both Peter and his companion John, also a fisherman, were *agrammatoi*, a Greek word that literally means 'unlettered,' that is, 'illiterate'" (87).

Let's review the passage: "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people . . . And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:8ff). Please note the basis for the rulers responses, "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated [*agrammatoi*] and untrained [*idiotes*] men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus" (v13).

The confounding of the Jewish court by "uneducated [*agrammatoi*] and untrained [*idiotes*]" was not due to reading Peter and John's cursive handwriting or examining their Greek composition skills, it was upon hearing their confident, Spirit-filled declarations which were themselves in response to the instantaneous miracle of healing the lame (i.e., "silver and gold have I none"). Marshall says, ". . . the two Greek words translate a Hebrew phrase which refers to people ignorant of the Torah or Jewish law, and this is no doubt the sense here. The implication is that the apostles' eloquence was inspired by the Spirit."<sup>31</sup> In other words, *they could talk so well because they had "been with Jesus."* Their abilities as literal "writers" are not the issue. Is there any reason to deny Peter and John's demonstrated and Spirit-empowered verbal and oratory capacity?

Ancient "writing" was much more a matter of "speaking" than writing is today. Richards provides an example of an ancient "writer" who does not actually write. "Speusippus reports that his health is poor but that he is still able to 'write' because 'my tongue and the faculties of my head are intact.'"<sup>32</sup> Wall says, "Not only do letters convey what the writer might say in person, but also ancient letters were written to be read aloud to an audience (see Eph 3:2-4; Rev 1:3). The oral audience of antiquity was attuned to a speech that affects the ear."<sup>33</sup> Ben Witherington III observes, "In the largely oral culture of the Greco-Roman world, Paul's so-called letters and documents like Hebrews were orally delivered by Paul's co-workers as speeches, and more importantly they reflect the structure and practices of ancient rhetoric."<sup>34</sup>

Ehrman's response to the "secretary hypothesis" (on Peter) is weak. This discussion arises from 1 Peter 5:12 which says, "Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God." Silvanus (probably also Silas and possible Tertius) was clearly capable, as he is the co-author of 1-2 Thess. Ehrman references this (1Pt 5:12) without any discussion and concludes he was a mere

<sup>29</sup> M. Luther Stirewalt, Jr., *Paul the Letter Writer* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 10.

<sup>30</sup> E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blindness to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Marshall says, "It was all the more surprising to the court because the apostles had had no particular training in theology or rhetoric. Uneducated could mean illiterate, and the word translated common (Gk. *idiotes*) refers to lay persons who had no interest in public affairs. C. H. Dodd, however, has claimed that . . . [see above]" I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC 5; IVP/Accordance electronic ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 107.

<sup>32</sup> Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing*, 61

<sup>33</sup> Wall, *Introduction to Epistolary Literature*, 379

<sup>34</sup> Witherington says Ehrman is silent on this entire aural phenomena, while providing an excellent example: "Let us consider for a moment what Papias says about the composition of the Gospel we know as Mark's Gospel." "And the elder used to say this, Mark became Peter's interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said and done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had followed him, but later on, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded but not making, as it were, an arrangement of the Lord's oracles, so that Mark did nothing wrong in thus writing down single points as he remembered them. For to one thing he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in them." (quoted in Eusebius H.E. 3.39.4ff)." <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2011/04/07/forged-chapter-four-alternatives-to-forgery/>

“carrier” (88).<sup>35</sup> “Peter could not have dictated this letter in Greek to a secretary any more than he could have written it in Greek. That would have required him to be perfectly fluent in Greek, to have mastered rhetorical techniques in Greek, and to have had an intimate familiarity with the Jewish Scriptures in Greek” (88, see also 157). But Constantine did just that: “The emperor was in the habit of composing his orations in the Latin tongue, from which they were translated into Greek by interpreters appointed for this special service.”<sup>36</sup> Is it really beyond the evidence, to think that Peter, James, John or Jude could not have preached or spoken the content of their respective books, which was then denoted by secretaries, edited and approved by the respective authors in collaboration with others?

Consider again what Ehrman says, “Virtually all of the problems with what I’ve been calling forgeries can be solved if secretaries were heavily involved in the composition of the early Christian writings” (152). *Well --- secretaries were heavily involved. Ergo: Virtually all of the problems of forgeries are solved.*

### Defending Truth by Forgery

All of the issues above have to do with arguments, evidence, and conclusions through the use of inferences, reasoning and logic. We look at limited data (such as references to secretaries, etc.) and then argue toward “reasoned” conclusions. Ehrman does this and so do we all. But who has an *epistemic right* to appeal to reason or truth?

The central argument of *Forged* is that while early Christian writers of all stripes<sup>37</sup> claim to speak *the truth*, they have often lied (as forgers) about their identity. Christian forgeries are literary deceptions which call for belief in the truth. This is more than a literary irony. In the case of canonical documents, it is an argument to discredit the majority of the NT.

For example, whoever wrote Ephesians “knew full well that he was not Paul. Falsely claiming to be an impeccable Christian authority, this advocate for truth produced a *pseudepigraphon*, a ‘falsely inscribed writing’” (161). Early Christians “had no qualms about lying in order to promote the faith, to practice deception in order to establish the truth” (198). Twisting the blade he urges, “. . . a religion that built its reputation on possessing the truth had members who attempted to disseminate their understanding of the truth through deceptive means” (277).

If early Christians practiced the *deceit* of forgery in order to promote the *truth* of orthodox doctrine, that is a problem. But it is an *ethical problem*, not an epistemological one. It is not, strictly speaking, a problem with “truth” (excepting the false attribution part). Forgery is *ethically* wrong, but it does not necessarily mean that all the forged propositions are untrue.<sup>38</sup> People usually create forgeries of something that is true or authentic. No one forges a three dollar bill. So if a zealous person(s) composed a fierce defense of the orthodox view of the resurrection and attributed it to Paul, the “truth” of the work is dependent on whether Paul’s doctrine is (in fact) true.<sup>39</sup> But even to investigate this, one presupposes some standard of truth, regardless of whether the forger applied that standard of truth to his claim as author.

### The Epistemic Structure of Truth Claims

<sup>35</sup> Richards himself, after a thorough inquiry argues “through Silvanus” means “carrier,” but still concludes: “How then do we find our way out of the problems of the Greek of 1 Peter (or 2 Peter)? The stylistic peculiarities/dissimilarities of 1 Peter and 2 Peter are easily explained by the intermediation of a secretary” (431, “SILVANUS WAS NOT PETER’S SECRETARY: THEOLOGICAL BIAS IN INTERPRETING...IN 1 PETER 5:12” in JETS 43/3 [September 2000] 417–432). Schreiner summarizes: “A number of scholars have supported such a view, understanding Silvanus to be the amanuensis or secretary of 1 Peter. 3 E.g., L. Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 369–71; E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 11, 241; J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Thornapple Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 215. Selwyn believes he was both the secretary and bearer of the letter. P. H. Davids argues that Silvanus is the primary author behind the letter and its contents derive from him (*The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 198). . . . As we noted in the introduction, ascribing the letter to Silvanus possibly could solve the problem of the excellent Greek found in the letter. . . . The phrase to “write through someone” (*graphein dia tinou*) during the time the New Testament was written does not identify the amanuensis but the carrier of the letter. . . . What we have here is a formula designating the bearer of the letter (cf. Ignatius, Rom. 10:1; Phld. 11:2; Smyrn. 12:1; Pol. 8:1; Polycarp, Phil. 14:1).” Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (NAC 37; ed. E. Ray Clendenen; Accordance electronic ed. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 248.

<sup>36</sup> Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Eusebius Pamphilus: Church History, Life of Constantine, & Oration in Praise of Constantine* (NPNF-2 I; Accordance electronic ed. 14 vols.; New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1890), n.p.

<sup>37</sup> Canonical, orthodox, heterodox and heretical.

<sup>38</sup> There may also be a number of intermediate positions between a true attribution and flat-out forgery and deceit, such as a person revising and updating a work of a previous writer, an editor making substantial changes, a loose translation into a foreign language, an authorized letter composed by someone else. Today we have conventions for this in forewords and descriptions. Bock provides an example of one of these in the radio interview, “Was the New Testament Forged? Bart Ehrman vs Darrell Bock” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXSvRkKD3FM>

<sup>39</sup> Ehrman: “One recent study of 3 Corinthians has shown that the forger, who was intent on opposing the false teachings of the heretics, does so by teaching ideas about the flesh that are contrary to what the real, historical Paul taught” (103).

It is certainly an internal tension within Christianity when unbelievers point out that Christians sometimes lie. Surprise, surprise. But orthodox Christian faith does not pretend that its adherents are sinlessly honest. Hypocrisy is real, but does not invalidate the truth claims of our faith. *Let God be true and every man a liar*. These are failures, no doubt, and perhaps Honest Ehrman has done us a service by pointing these out. But on what grounds can Honest Ehrman account for “truth” in the first place? He claims he is “interested in the truth” (16). While he is criticizing alleged forgeries for lying, he is presupposing that truth is real, may be appealed to as an arbiter, and a departure from it is ethically erroneous or questionable. Given his God-doubting, Christ-denying, Scripture-denying worldview, “what is truth” to Honest Ehrman? Christians can acknowledge both truth and departures from it because the Triune God of Scripture is the only certain account of truth.<sup>40</sup> Can Ehrman’s espoused agnosticism account for the preconditions of truth?<sup>41</sup>

One cannot speak of falsity or forgery with presupposing truth and truth presupposes a worldview in which there are objectively true standards of logic, as well as other epistemological prerequisites. Ehrman cannot argue about truth and lies without inadvertently invoking an objective Triune-God-intellisphere. Objective Mind (the Triune God’s revelation) is behind our minds’ activities.<sup>42</sup> The God of Scripture and His truth are the very preconditions of reasonable interchange about such matters as forgeries.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For more on this approach, see *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* by Greg L. Bahnsen (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> The Wikipedia reports his agnosticism due to the problem of evil and suffering: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bart\\_D.\\_Ehrman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bart_D._Ehrman)

<sup>42</sup> See my ETS 2012 paper address Sam Harris who tries to do just that (objective ethics without God), “The Morass of Sam Harris’s Moral Landscape” at <http://www.wordmp3.com/files/gS/ETSe2012StrawbridgeMoralLandscape.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> This transcendental-structured apologetic is also good medicine for the problem of evil which seems to be a problem to Ehrman. There cannot be a problem of evil without evil and there cannot be evil without an absolute standard by which to measure it over against what is unchangeably good. But only a theistic worldview can account for an unchangeable good. So in an anti-theistic world, evil cannot exist. In such a world, evil must be redefined apart from some absolute standard, in which case it is not evil in the sense that creates a “problem of evil.”

## APPENDIX: Doctrinal Objections to Pauline Authorship

On Paul's writings, Ehrman says, "Virtually all scholars agree that seven of the Pauline letters are authentic: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. These seven cohere well together and appear stylistically, theologically, and in most every other way to be by the same person" (106). Most of the challenges regarding the vocabulary, setting and content differences are quite debatable at an interpretive level.<sup>44</sup>

1) Ehrman contrasts the "authentic Paul" vs the "deutero-Paul" on the resurrection. He argues, in the "real" Paul, "Christians have not yet been raised with Christ. But contrast this statement with what Ephesians says: 'Even when we were dead through our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places' (2:5-6). Here believers have experienced a spiritual resurrection and are enjoying a heavenly existence in the here and now. This is precisely the view that Paul argued against in his letters to the Corinthians!" (126-127). However, the entire argument of our union with Christ in Romans 6 concludes, "Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). Further, Romans 8:10-11 "If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."<sup>45</sup> The resurrection life we now have is an extension of being "in Christ" or our identity and union with Christ obviously taught in Romans, 1 Corinthians and Galatians (see Gal. 2:20). In 2 Corinthians 5:17 resurrection conceptions are present. Those "in Christ" are "new creation" (καινή κτίσις).

2) Some of Ehrman's other arguments are just simple factual errors. He says, "Moreover, this author [Ephesians] indicates that believers have already been "saved" by the grace of God. As it turns out, the verb "saved" in Paul's authentic letters is always used to refer to the future. Salvation is not something people already have; it's what they will have when Jesus returns on the clouds of heaven and delivers his followers from the wrath of God" (126). This is demonstrably false since σωζω (sōzō) is used in the aorist passive indicative in Romans 8:24, in the present tense in 1 Cor. 1:18, and a present participle in 2 Cor. 2:15. We were saved, are being saved and shall be saved. Hence another example of the "already-not-yet" NT theological structure.

Another factual blunder, he argues that unlike the charismatic, unstructured Corinthian church, in the Pastorals Epistles, "Here you have the pastors Timothy and Titus. You have the church leaders: bishops and deacons. You have hierarchy, structure, organization. That is to say, you have a different historical situation than you had in the days of Paul" (116). This despite admitting the authenticity of Philippians which begins, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including *the overseers and deacons.*" To Ehrman Luke is not early or authentic, but even so, Luke represents such structured leadership after the very first missionary journey: "When they had appointed elders for them in every church" (Acts 14:23).

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<sup>44</sup> Wallace has a nice response on Statistics per Pastoral Epistles vocabulary. <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2011/07/book-review-of-bart-d-ehrman's-forged-part-2/>

<sup>45</sup> Dunn says, "... Paul implies that the risen Christ is now experienced in and through the Spirit, indeed as the Spirit of God, the Spirit of creation and of prophecy." James D. G. Dunn, Romans 1-8 (WBC 38A; Accordance/Thomas Nelson electronic ed. Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 446.