

The Pauline Authorship of Ephesians

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## Introduction

The following paper is a contribution to the discussion on the authorship of Ephesians. Currently there is much debate on whether the author was the Apostle Paul, or some other pseudonymous writer claiming to be Paul. This paper will examine the history of the debate and some of the underlying philosophies behind the thinking of the differing views. After examining the history and the evidence of the debate, a conclusion will be put forward by this author.

### Historic Beliefs on Authorship of Ephesians

When discussing canonicity, authorship, and history of biblical books, it is necessary to consider the opinions and evaluations of those throughout church history. It stands as logical that those who were closest to the original composition of a book will be well-informed as to its authorship. Therefore, the following examination is conducted of the church fathers' writings to find their view of the authorship of Ephesians.

According to Hoehner, "Ephesians has the earliest attestation of any NT book. Already in the first century or very early second century Clement of Rom (fl. 96), when mentioning 'one God and one Christ and one Spirit,' may be a reference to Eph 4:4-6."<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the phrase, "open the eyes of our heart that we might know you [God]"<sup>2</sup> likely alludes to Eph 1:17-18. In addition to Clement of Rome, the earliest of the Fathers, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Irenaeus all show familiarity with the book.<sup>3</sup>

Not only was Ephesians recognized in existence, but it was also considered authoritative. Polycarp recognized this by stating, "For I trust that ye are well versed in the Sacred Scriptures

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<sup>1</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: an Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2 vol. 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2006), 228.

<sup>3</sup> Hoehner, 3.

... It is declared then in these Scriptures, ‘be ye angry and sin not,’ and ‘Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.’”<sup>4</sup> Here Polycarp quotes from Psalm 4:5 and Ephesians 4:26, equating both unquestionably with Scripture, and thus authoritative.

Ephesians is clearly recognized as Scriptural and an authoritative writing for the church body. The question remains, did the early church recognize Pauline authorship? The evidence demonstrates an answer in the affirmative.

Irenaeus (130-200 A.D.) explicitly quotes Ephesians 5:30 directly by stating, “even as the blessed Paul declares in his Epistle to the Ephesians, that ‘we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.’”<sup>5</sup> Irenaeus goes on multiple times in *Against Heresies* to refer to Ephesians being attributed to the Apostle Paul.<sup>6</sup>

History also tells of an individual named Marcion, who lived in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. He was very influential and propagated a theology which rejected the Old Testament and marked a distinction between the Great God of goodness and an inferior God of justice, who was the Creator and God of the Jews.<sup>7</sup> Marcion’s anti-Jewish attitude caused him to reject the entire Old Testament, and the parts of the New Testament which he felt were too Jewish. This led to a rejection of all the gospels except Luke.<sup>8</sup> Marcion was a supporter of the Apostle Paul because Paul appeared to be less Jewish-friendly than the other parts of Scripture. Marcion ended up compiling his own body of writings which he considered Scripture. Pertaining to our

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, vol 1 (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 35.

<sup>5</sup> Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, vol 1, 528.

<sup>6</sup> Hoehner, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 91.

<sup>8</sup> Metzger, 92.

discussion, it is notable that he included Ephesians (which he labeled, “Laodiceans”)<sup>9</sup> in the body of works which he attributed to Paul’s pen.

Another ancient source which gives historical evidence to the discussion is the Muratorian Canon document. The Muratorian Canon, named after Muratori who found the manuscript in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, is assumed to have been written by a contemporary of Pius around the year 170 A.D.<sup>10</sup> The Muratorian Canon is not a complete composition, but rather a fragment. Yet, even so, it provides much evidence as to what books the early church held to as authoritative. The Muratorian Canon attributes thirteen epistles to the Apostle Paul (nine being addressed to churches and four to individuals).<sup>11</sup> The Pauline letters are grouped together in this fragment in a most interesting manner. They are listed as follows: 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Romans.<sup>12</sup>

What is most significant about the Muratorian Canon fragment is that it also mentions books which are pseudonymous. Specifically listed is the Epistle to the Laodiceans, and another to the Alexandrians, both being forged from someone using Paul’s name.<sup>13</sup> This is significant that the early church already was aware of and making distinction between the books which were actually authored by Paul, and those that falsely claimed to be so.

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<sup>9</sup> Metzger, 94.

<sup>10</sup> B.F. Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (New York: MacMillan, 1889), 212.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 217.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 218.

The early evidence of early church history is overwhelmingly in favor of the Pauline authorship of Ephesians. The above selection of evidence is only a sample so as to demonstrate to the reader that the early church was convinced of Pauline authorship.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Evolution of Scholarship Concerning the Authorship of Ephesians**

As seen from the previous section, the overwhelming historical evidence sides with Pauline authorship. Carson and Moo aptly summarize the fact that, “No one seems to have queried Pauline authorship until the modern period.”<sup>15</sup>

As the years have developed, modern scholarship has begun to depart from the universal consensus of Pauline authorship.

This denial began in the nineteenth century when F.C. Baur argued that Ephesians employed Gnostic terms and ideas. The late date of Gnosticism effectively precluded Paul’s authorship. R. Bultmann and his disciples followed Baur, which led to an escalating loss of confidence that Paul wrote Ephesians. Though many scholars have rightly abandoned the idea of a Gnostic background to Ephesians, literary and theological issues continue to call Paul’s authorship into question today.<sup>16</sup>

In order to understand why there has been an evolution within the last couple hundred of years concerning the authorship of Paul, the philosophy and methodology which led up to the time and circumstances of F.C. Baur must be briefly explored.

The key foundation which led to the change of thinking among scholars took place in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Francis Bacon put his name on the map when he published *Novum Organum* (1620), which became the foundation for historical criticism. In his work, Bacon

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<sup>14</sup> Additional lists of canonical books of the early church can be found in Metzger, 305-315. The way the early church grouped the books was the gospels first, and the epistles of Paul second. In these lists of the early church, Ephesians is consistently labeled as a letter from Paul.

<sup>15</sup> D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 480.

<sup>16</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: an Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 580.

claimed that all truth is discovered inductively.<sup>17</sup> Bacon stretched this reasoning beyond scientific inquiry and claimed that this method was the only method by which the truth and understanding can be discovered in any discipline; whether that be sciences, logic, ethics, and politics.<sup>18</sup> It was this thinking which promoted science and analysis as the true method for learning. Truth was to be learned pragmatically and experientially.<sup>19</sup> It was this thinking which would lay the foundation on which others would build upon, leading to a critical attitude of Scripture.

Building upon the foundational Inductivism of Bacon, the evolution of thinking began to shift toward the ideology of Naturalism, a philosophy championed by Benedict Spinoza in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in 1670.<sup>20</sup> Spinoza argued against any supernatural interventions in the world. He also argued against the veracity of many of the accounts within Scripture. He disagreed with the resurrection of Christ, and lauded anyone who sought the true meaning behind the miraculous elements of the biblical accounts.<sup>21</sup> “Spinoza’s naturalism led directly to the first modern systematic negative criticism of the Bible... His work was the inspiration for Richard Simon who became known as the ‘Father of Modern Biblical Criticism.’”<sup>22</sup>

This ideology which was beginning to take the world by force was instrumental in promoting the scientific study of Scripture. Two men who were notably influenced were J.S.

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<sup>17</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 312.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Norman L. Geisler, “Beware Of Philosophy: A Warning To Biblical Scholars” *JETS*. Vol. 42 No. 1 (March 1999), 4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Semler and J.D. Michaelis.<sup>23</sup> These two men were both influenced by the textual criticism of Bengel and Wettstein. Semler published a scientific study of the New Testament entitled *Treatise on the Free Investigation of the Canon* (1771-75).<sup>24</sup> Michaelis also published a work entitled *Introduction to the Divine Scriptures of the New Covenant*. Both works of Semler and Michaelis were concerned with a comprehensive discussion of the historical problems of the New Testament and its individual books.<sup>25</sup>

Semler and Michaelis had a profound influence on Johann Jakob Griesbach, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and Johann Gottfried Eichhorn. These individuals each made significant contributions to the thinking of interdependence among the biblical authors.<sup>26</sup> Eichhorn in particular advanced the idea that the Gospel writers must have drawn from a common source, and must not have written independently. Eichhorn believed that the Gospel writers drew upon a Hebrew or Aramaic gospel, and each provided his own translation.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the scholastic thinking had begun to develop around inter-textual comparison, and the scientific study of form and content.

Due to the influence of the Bacon, Spinoza, and the other influential, rationalistic thinkers from Germany, the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century became the time in which many of the decisive works of historical criticism began to present themselves.<sup>28</sup> The two men who contributed the

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<sup>23</sup> Werner Georg Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, Trans. by Gilmour, S. McClean and Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 62.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 74-8.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

<sup>28</sup> Werner Georg Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems*, Trans. by Gilmour, S. McClean and Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 120.

greatest works during this time were David Friedrich Strauss and Ferdinand Christian Baur.<sup>29</sup>

Both men were heavily influenced by the rationalistic thinking of their German predecessors and became involved with historic criticism. Strauss was instrumental in compelling New Testament researchers to undertake a historical criticism of the New Testament no matter what the cost, specializing in the critical study of the gospel narratives.<sup>30</sup>

Baur embraced this same ideology and took his already well-developed enthusiasm for historical scholarship and began applying it to the Bible. In pertaining to the authorship of Ephesians, Baur's significant contribution took place in his article on "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde" [The Christ party in the Corinthian church]. It was in this article that Baur "maintained, on the basis of both the Corinthian letters, that Paul at Corinth was charged by the Judaizing adherents of Peter with not having been a disciple of the earthly Jesus."<sup>31</sup> Baur also "discovered the opposition of these Petrine Christians to Paul in other Pauline letters and in the primitive church, but also drew attention to later tendencies to gloss over the difference between the two directions."<sup>32</sup>

Emphasizing this early division within Christianity, Baur then examined the internal evidence within the Pauline letters in light of this interplay between the factions within Christianity. Baur then performed a full analysis on the Pauline epistles. The outcome of this critique and thinking resulted in the rejection of Pauline authorship for all books except the four great letters (Romans, I and II Corinthians, and Galatians).<sup>33</sup> All the other letters were regarded

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 126-7.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 135.

as belonging to the conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christianity. According to Baur, the other “Pauline” letters were not apostolic in their authorship.

It is significant to note at this time that Baur’s conclusions were proved to be based on faulty assumptions in Joseph Barber Lightfoot’s work, *Apostolic Fathers*.

According to Baur, the bitter Petrine-Pauline conflict continued into the latter half of the century. Lightfoot’s interpretation of Clement and Ignatius, however, presents a picture of the church at the beginning of the century untainted by Jewish-Gentile antagonism. To be sure, Lightfoot acknowledges conflict within the apostolic age, but he ascribed the cause of this conflict to Judaizers, not to Peter and the Jewish-Christian apostles.<sup>34</sup>

Though Baur’s theory was dismantled and could not be supported with the evidence, his legacy of demanding that every single writing be viewed and examined within the context of its historical situation was a mark left behind that would influence the Pauline scholarship throughout the rest of history.<sup>35</sup>

Baur’s legacy of examining the historical situation, and critically examining the claims of authorship have become prominent ways of thinking in biblical scholarship. Built upon the foundation of Inductivism and Naturalism, scholars now take up the mantle of critical evaluation of authorship.

Scholars who now take up this mantle are such as Dr. Bart D. Ehrman. Ehrman holds to the view that some there are forged books within the New Testament. “Antecedents for this kind of pseudonymous writing can certainly be found in the ancient world. Indeed, forgery was a relatively common and widely recognized practice in antiquity. This was a world in which there were no copyright laws and, in fact, no legislation of any kind to guarantee literary ownership.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*. Vol 2: From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 71.

<sup>35</sup> Kümmel, 136.

<sup>36</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 276.

To the scholarly world, the assumption is that the Bible can include forged documents, just as any other ancient source. According to the rationalistic philosophy employed in the post-enlightenment era, the Bible cannot be a divine book. It must be critically examined as any other book. It is with this understanding that any apparent disagreement between one's presupposition of Pauline authorship and the book of Ephesians provokes a judgment that Paul cannot be the author. Now, according to Ehrman, "The majority of critical scholars are convinced that Paul did not write [Ephesians]."<sup>37</sup> Although there is now considerable disagreement on whether or not Ephesians is written by Paul, it would be wrong to assume that there is an overwhelming majority of scholars on one side or the other (contra Ehrman).<sup>38</sup>

To summarize, the scholarly opinion concerning the book of Ephesians has experienced an evolution of thought. From the near-universal testimony of the early church of Pauline authorship, the modern scholars have become very critical and consider the authorship of Scripture most dubious. Reason has been elevated as the chief judge concerning the authorship and evidence of Scripture. In addressing this concern, notable German scholar, Dr. Eta Linnemann states the following:

Reason is a whore, Luther says. There is nothing for which logical arguments cannot be adduced. We should resist beguilement through logical arguments. Our minds are swayed by logical arguments, but such arguments are never free standing. They are always wrapped up in a complex of presuppositions. It is not just that questionable arguments exist: arguments themselves are questionable—that is, they must be traced back to their presuppositions. Insofar as they are logical, they may appear to be neutral, but they are most assuredly not.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 283.

<sup>38</sup> A summary table of past and current scholarly opinion concerning the authorship of Ephesians is provided by Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: an Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002) 9-20. An analysis of this information demonstrates that it is untrue to assert that most scholars are against Pauline authorship.

<sup>39</sup> Eta Linnemann, *Biblical Criticism On Trial: How Scientific Is Scientific Theology?* 2001 ed. Trans. Robert Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2001), 180.

Since the time of Bacon, natural reason has been exalted. However, one must be aware of what presuppositions which are brought to the table. The evolution of biblical scholarly thinking has shown that critical investigation has become king, removing the belief that the Bible is a divine book, and that there is one divine author behind the composition of the whole book.

It is with these presuppositions that scholars raise arguments against the authenticity of Pauline authorship. The following section will examine the specific arguments which are brought against Pauline authorship.

### **Considering the Evidence for the Authorship of Ephesians**

It has been shown that the early church believed strongly that Ephesians was authored by the Apostle Paul. It has also been demonstrated that only recently has the evolution of thinking shifted to a more critical approach which promotes skepticism toward the claims of Scripture. Yet, in agreement with David G. Meade, it must be stated, “There is no real force in an argument from head-counting.”<sup>40</sup> The claims which have been brought against Pauline authorship must be examined and evaluated.

Before examining the evidence, it must be stated that the book of Ephesians itself claims to be written by Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:1). The book also carries claims of dealing with the personal affairs of Paul (1:1; 3:1; 6:21-22). This fact, coupled with the church’s long-time acceptance puts the burden of proof on those who do not accept Pauline authorship. Unless the traditional understanding of Paul’s authorship can be proven to be mistaken, it should be accepted.

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<sup>40</sup> David G. Meade, *Pseudonymity & Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 139.

Scholars who dismiss Paul's authorship of Ephesians point to five lines of evidence: Theology, Vocabulary, Literary Style, the Relationship to Colossians, and The Impersonal Nature of Ephesians.<sup>41</sup> These subjects will be addressed in topical order.

### Ephesian's Theology

Scholars tend to dismiss the authorship of Ephesians due to differences in Pauline theology found in the book. O'Brien sums up the argument as follows:

It is not simply that there has been a development in Paul's thought or that the apostle needed to address a historical situation different from those to which the genuine letters were sent. Rather, there are too many divergences, and these indicate an entirely changed perspective which reveals a later stage of theological reflection.<sup>42</sup>

The theology is viewed as so different from Paul's other writings that it cannot be attributed to him.

One of the alleged theological differences is an emphasis on Christ's exaltation rather than an emphasis on his death. This argument loses persuasiveness when studying the book of Acts. It can be adequately shown that the exaltation and enthronement theme found in Ephesians is found throughout the New Testament, and particularly in Pauline speeches (Acts 23:6; 24:14-15; 26:23). This theme is also generally acknowledged in the other writings of Paul (Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:3-28; Phil 2:9-11).<sup>43</sup> It is also apparent in Ephesians that the death of Christ is not neglected. In fact, the theology of atonement by Christ's death is abundant. "Traditional terminology for Christ's death, such as his 'blood' (1:7;2:13), 'cross' (2:16), 'flesh' (= 'death' at 2:15), 'sacrifice' (5:2), and 'gave himself up' (5:25), all appear. Redemption and the forgiveness

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<sup>41</sup> Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 580.

<sup>42</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 21.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

of sins have been won through his sacrificial death (1:7).”<sup>44</sup> Clearly then, the theological emphasis in this area is not sufficient to cause one to doubt Pauline authorship.

Others claim that ecclesiology within Ephesians focuses on the universal church, whereas other Pauline writings focus on the local church. Although it is true that Ephesians focuses on the universal church as a whole, that is not to say this is absent from other Pauline writings. 1 Corinthians 1:2 refers not only to the local body at Corinth, but also to those Christians “in every place.”<sup>45</sup> Additionally, Paul’s ecclesiastical discussion in 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 and Romans 12:4-8 give no evidence of being limited to one local body.<sup>46</sup> In fact, these passages are remarkably parallel to Ephesians 4:11. It can be assumed that Paul also refers to the universal church when he discusses his former life of persecuting the church (1 Corinthians 15:9; Gal 1:13; Phil 3:6).<sup>47</sup>

Scholars will claim that Ephesians has to be written by another author because of the ecclesiological emphasis which places the apostles and prophets as the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20) instead of the normal Pauline imagery of Christ being the foundation of the church (1 Corinthians 3:11; Colossians 2:7). In answer to this claim, it must be stated that an author must have the liberty to change his metaphors to stress different ideas. However, even with that light, the following comment by Hoehner is helpful in explaining the apparent difference: “If in Ephesians one views the words “apostles” and “prophets” as genitives of apposition, namely, “the foundation consisting of the apostles and prophets,” then Christ

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> All Scripture quotations in NASB unless otherwise stated.

<sup>46</sup> Hoehner, 53.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

becomes the chief cornerstone of that foundation. Though the imagery is changed, it is not a contradiction but an extension of the imagery in 1 Cor 3:11.”<sup>48</sup>

There is no doubt that the doctrine of the church is far more developed in Ephesians, but if the letter were a later writing from someone other than Paul, the differences would be far greater. Guthrie’s comment is helpful:

An ecclesiastic would have labored his comments on the Christian ministry far more than this writer has done. There is a wide gap between Ephesians and Clement’s letter to the Corinthians on this subject, yet according to Goodspeed’s theory both belong to the same period of church development. When compared with Clement’s views of the ministry, Ephesians is essentially Pauline.<sup>49</sup>

Of the theological arguments that are brought forward against Pauline authorship, none stand to be convincing to the critical examination of Pauline theology. There is no unique thought in Ephesians that is not at least alluded to in other Pauline thought. Therefore, on the basis of theological differences, Pauline authorship cannot be rejected.

### Literary Style

The next argument which is used against Pauline authorship is that of literary style.

By means of almost interminable sentences the letter moves along slowly and majestically like a glacier that worms its way down the valley inch by inch. See 1:3-14; 1:15-23; 2:1-10; 2:14-18; 2:19-22; 3:1-12; 3:14-19; 4:11-16; and 6:13-20. Within these length sentences there is often a descriptive verbosity that is completely uncharacteristic of the real Paul... all this is in sharp contrast with the concise, abrupt, lively, impetuous style that characterizes the real Paul.<sup>50</sup>

The argument that sentences in Ephesians have abnormal length does not carry weight when examined. It has been recognized that 2 Thessalonians, though short, has just as many long

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>49</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, Revised Ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 523.

<sup>50</sup> Hendriksen, William. *Exposition of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, WHNTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 45.

sentences (possibly more) proportionally as Ephesians.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Paul commonly used long sentences in doxologies (Ephesians 1:3-14, 15-23; 3:14-19; Romans 8:38-39; 11:33-39; 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Philippians 1:3-8; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-5; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10), doctrinal content (Ephesians 2:1-7; 3:2-13; Romans 3:21-26; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29; 2:6-9) and parenthetical materials (Ephesians 4:1-6, 11-16; 6:14-20; 1 Corinthians 12:8-11; Philippians 1:27-11).<sup>52</sup>

Additional arguments against Pauline authorship are made on the basis of vocabulary. “In terms of vocabulary, those who reject Paul’s authorship point out that Ephesians uses unique language not found elsewhere in Paul and contend that the letter has too many *hapax legomena* (words that only occur once in the Pauline corpus) to be considered Pauline.”<sup>53</sup>

This argumentation on the basis of vocabulary has been found to be spurious and misguided. In order for this type of argumentation to be effective percentages would have to be taken from all NT writings. Scholar, Eta Linnemann has undertaken such a study and has constructed a summary chart of her findings.<sup>54</sup> Her conclusion is stated as follows, “If we take into account the hapaxes in all the New Testament writings—an obvious enough requirement for work wishing to be regarded as scientific—then it becomes evident that it is absurd to use their occurrence as a criterion for authenticity.”<sup>55</sup> Further, as a result of her comparisons, Linnemann is inclined to state, “The investigation above makes clear that historical-critical theology’s use of

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<sup>51</sup> Hoehner, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown*, 582.

<sup>54</sup> Linnemann, *Biblical Criticism On Trial*, 104.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 105.

(frequent) occurrence of hapax legomena as evidence in questions of genuineness is due solely to ignorance, inconsistency, and lack of scientific rigor.”<sup>56</sup>

Linnemann’s arguments above are demonstrably accurate when comparing the fact that, although forty-one words are found to be unique in Ephesians, the similar-sized book of Galatians, which is almost universally regarded as Pauline, contains thirty-five hapax legomena.<sup>57</sup> In fact, one can easily recognize that “Paul uses unusual vocabulary in each of his works.”<sup>58</sup> Hoehner concludes, “There is no reason why Paul could not use unique vocabulary in his letters and also demonstrate flexibility in vocabulary usage.”<sup>59</sup>

#### The Relationship to Colossians

“The strongest argument against authenticity is the dependence of Ephesians upon Colossians.”<sup>60</sup> Most scholars see some sort of dependence by Ephesians upon Colossians, but the nature of dependence is uncertain.<sup>61</sup> The most common arguments in regard to the Ephesians-Colossians relationship are these:<sup>62</sup> 1) Ephesians appears to be the work of an imitator who used Colossians for some of his thoughts and language. 2) Ephesians does not follow Colossians close enough, and therefore cannot be authentic.

As can be seen, however, these reasons tend to cancel themselves out. There is much ambiguity about whether Ephesians was copied or not. If it was copied, why does it not more

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> O’Brien, 5-6.

<sup>58</sup> Hoehner, 24.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>60</sup> Meade, *Pseudonymity & Canon*, 141.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 485.

closely resemble Colossians? But, if an imitator did borrow from Colossians, why did he borrow? And why did he send the letter to a region so close to Colossae, and in such a proximate time frame as the first letter?

The proposed evidence of the Ephesians-Colossians relationship does not prove Pauline or non-Pauline authorship in the least. In answer to an alleged imitator, Carson and Moo aptly point out, “Why would an author send so similar a letter to the same region so soon after the first? Surely it makes more sense to suppose that Ephesians was written two or three decades later, and by someone else.”<sup>63</sup> Additionally, the fact that Timothy’s name is missing from the introduction, as well as all other names are missing (except Tychicus), gives little credit to the theory that Colossians had been copied.<sup>64</sup> So, though there may be certain similar themes and vocabulary, it one can be reasonably certain that at least the letter was not copied.

It can also be stated that the literary similarity between Ephesians and Colossians has been somewhat overplayed.

There are thirty-eight words unique to Colossians and sixty-three words in Colossians not found elsewhere in Paul but found elsewhere in the NT (as mentioned above this compares to fort-one words unique to Ephesians and eighty-four words in Ephesians not found elsewhere in Paul but found elsewhere in the NT). Takings this a bit further, there are twenty-one words in Ephesians and Colossians not found elsewhere in Paul but found elsewhere in the NT and only eleven words in Ephesians and Colossians that are not found elsewhere in the NT. One would have thought that if an imitator of Paul had copied from Colossians, far more verbal correspondence would exist between the two epistles, especially when much of the content is similar.<sup>65</sup>

Had there been complete dependence of either Ephesians upon Colossians or Colossians upon Ephesians, there would undoubtedly be more similarity.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Heohner, 31.

Another supposed problem that scholars recognize is the frequent Pauline use of parallel words and terminology which is used in a different sense in Ephesians than in Colossians.<sup>66</sup> “The problem is whether it is psychologically possible for a man with such fluency as Paul to repeat words and phrases, but with a different meaning.”<sup>67</sup> For example, Guthrie lists the fact that the word οἰκονομία (stewardship) is used in Colossians 1:25 to describe an entrusted task, but Ephesians refers to the same word as the planned economy of God (3:2).<sup>68</sup>

This view, though accurate in stating that Ephesians uses similar words and phrases occasionally in different ways does not prove or disprove Pauline authorship. Hoehner gives valuable insight into this subject:

It is natural for a single individual to use both similar vocabulary and/or expressions and yet incorporate different emphases for a different audience. This practice is common today. Often an article read to a scholarly society is later rewritten and presented to an audience of laypeople. Although there are changes, much of the vocabulary and expression will remain the same.<sup>69</sup>

Guthrie concludes, “These variations of meaning will naturally assume a greater significance for those already persuaded of non-Pauline authorship than for supporters of authenticity. A fair conclusion would be that the evidence does not demand the rejection of Pauline authorship.”<sup>70</sup>

### The Impersonal Nature of Ephesians

Another argument that is brought forward is the alleged impersonal nature of Ephesians. In contrast to the personal nature of a Thessalonian or Corinthian epistle, or even the personal touch of Galatians or Colossians, Ephesians appears very general and impersonal to the reader.

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<sup>66</sup> Guthrie, 502.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Hoehner, 35.

<sup>70</sup> Guthrie, 514.

[The author] gives no details of his suffering or imprisonment in the letter. He appears to have only a general knowledge of his readers (1:13, 15, 16), and questions whether they had heard of his administration of God's grace in ministering to Gentiles (3:2); he also questions their reception of the instruction they had received (4:21). The lack of personal greeting to members of the church at Ephesus is surprising, given that he sends extended greetings to the Christians in Rome, a city he had not visited (Rom 15-16). All of this reinforces the picture of an author without any intimate connection with his readers.<sup>71</sup>

This evidence appears to bring the reader to the conclusion that the author did not share a personal connection with his readers. After all, Paul had been to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-21) and ministered there, after leaving, he returned a year later to stay for two and a half years (19:1-20:1). A year later he even called the elders of Ephesus to meet him on his way to Jerusalem (20:16-38). With all of this time spent with the Ephesian people, how could Paul seem so distant to his readers? In fact, in Ephesians 1:15 he states that he had "heard" of their faith. No doubt his expression of their faith would be stronger if he was familiar with them.

This argument in actuality does not disprove or Pauline authorship. If an imposter were writing under the pseudonym of Paul, he would likely include more biographical information to let his readers know that either he was thinking along the same lines as Paul, or to try and convince his readers that he really was the Apostle. In and of itself, this problem does not carry enough weight to swing opinion, but it must still be addressed.

Some scholars find the solution to this problem in Ephesians 1:1, where the words ἐν Εφέσω are missing in some key manuscripts (notably p<sup>46</sup>, א\*, B\*).<sup>72</sup> O'Brien, for example, concludes that "in Ephesus" was not part of the original reading, thus the letter could still be

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<sup>71</sup> O'Brien, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Kurt Aland, et. al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27<sup>th</sup> ed., in *Biblia Sacra Utriusque Testamenti Editio Hebraica et Graeca* (Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 503.

written by the apostle, but it was not then addressed to the Ephesians specifically, but is a general epistle written to mostly Gentile believers in southwestern Asia Minor.<sup>73</sup>

A more probable solution would be to accept the reading “in Ephesus” as original.<sup>74</sup> So, what of the impersonal nature of the letter? In answer to this question it should be stated that Paul does not give personal greetings in 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philippians, even though he was familiar with these churches.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, although addressed to the church in Ephesus, the letter could very well have been meant for other churches in the suburbs of the teeming metropolis that is Ephesus. Opposing the traditional circular letter theory are scholars such as Guthrie.<sup>76</sup> The traditional circular letter theory holds that the place for “in Ephesus” was left blank, so that the name of the church could be filled in. There is no need to necessitate a blank left for the addressee of the book. Paul’s writings were often written for the purpose of a wide distribution. Galatians was written for the churches scattered in Galatia. Additionally, Colossians was to be read in the church of Laodicea (Col 4:16), and likewise, the church of Colossae was to read an epistle that was coming from Laodicea. So, even though a letter was addressed to a specific body, there is no reason to constrict its intended circular audience.

Another consideration is that it had been a considerable amount of time since Paul had visited Ephesus. “Since Paul had not visited Ephesus for five or six years, there may have been many new believers with whom he had no acquaintance. Thus he may not have wished to single

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<sup>73</sup> O’Brien, 5.

<sup>74</sup> See Hoehner, 144-8.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>76</sup> Guthrie, 530-1.

out those he knew, since his emphasis was on the unity of all believers.”<sup>77</sup> Also, Paul’s concern and personal nature do come out in the epistle through his periodic prayers for the believers. Paul prays for the believers, and asks for their prayers on his behalf (6:19-20).<sup>78</sup> It seems clear that, at the very least, the alleged evidence of an “impersonal nature” is not weighty enough to overturn the historic view of Pauline authorship.

Furthermore, it seems that the better Paul knew the church, the fewer personal greetings were given. For example, Romans has the most extensive greetings, yet he had never been there. On the other hand, the Thessalonian epistles include no greetings and Paul had been there a few weeks earlier. Perhaps one of the reasons for greetings was to strengthen his credibility.<sup>79</sup>

#### Summary of the Evidence for the Authorship of Ephesians

In conclusion, the consideration of the evidence does not lead one to reject the traditional interpretation of the Pauline author of Ephesians. At the very least, if not proving Pauline authorship, it is inconclusive. Each individual claim against the Pauline authorship of Ephesians is readily answerable. There is no part of Ephesians which is not within the normal characterization of the apostles writing. Whether it is style, vocabulary, or theology, all evidence is in alignment within the boundary of what should be considered normal variation within an author’s repertoire.

#### Conclusion

This paper started out with the assumption that the traditional understanding of the Pauline authorship of Ephesians. This is the view which has been traditionally accepted for over 1700 years. Until the last two centuries of scholarship, the Pauline authorship of Ephesians has

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<sup>77</sup> Hoehner, 23.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

been virtually unquestioned. That being so, the burden of proof lies on those who would see the author as different than the Apostle Paul.

It has been demonstrated that the birth of the critical approach to questioning the biblical authority has its roots in the pagan philosophies of Bacon, Spinoza, and Baur. These men were instrumental in contributing to a system which removed the divine inerrancy from the Bible, and sought to question its validity through a critical analysis. This analysis was based on the assumption that only rational reason and empirical findings could substantiate findings.

Especially key in this debate concerning the authorship of Ephesians was Baur's proposal of the Pauline-Petrine conflict which led to Baur's acceptance of only a portion of the Pauline corpus. Although Baur's reasoning and philosophical presuppositions were found to be false, they caught on with modern scholarship and fed the motivation to doubt the biblical claim of authorship. Now, the popular, scholarly thing to do is to test authorship and assume nothing. The purpose is to set out to prove an assumption. Now it has turned into the steps of forming a theory, and then setting out to prove that theory.

Although the early church almost unanimously agreed with the Pauline authorship of Ephesians, the assumption of much of modern scholarship is to doubt the authorship of Ephesians. However, the evidence does agree with the conclusion that the traditional authorship of Paul should be rejected. As has been shown, objections that are raised are dismissed with careful study and true scientific comparison.

A careful examination of the evidence gives no reason why the traditional authorship of Ephesians should be rejected. There is no weighty argument which does not have an adequate answer to meet it. In light of these findings, the traditional authorship of Ephesians, that of the Apostle Paul, should be retained.

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