

Who Wrote This Anyway?—Romans 16:22-24—6/23/2013

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As we come near the close of our study of Paul’s letter to the Romans, we’re faced today with some questions about the letter itself.

So open to Romans 16:21-24 and let’s read those verses to see why I entitled this message “Who Wrote This Anyway?”.

Follow along with me as I read Romans 16:21-24. [READ]

Over the last few weeks, each verse has presented a chance to look at a topic more broadly than what’s said in that verse.

So we studied what the Scriptures said about Satan & then about Timothy & what we could learn from his relationship with Paul.

Now again this week I expect that some of you have questions about why Tertius claims to write this letter in verse 22 when we’ve been saying all through our study that Paul wrote it.

And that raises questions not only about authorship, but also about the inspiration of these texts that we often refer to as God’s Word.

If that were not enough to move us to ask how we got the Bible, we have verse 24 in brackets in most of translations.

And that raises questions about the preservation of the Bible through the ages and how we know we still have what was originally written.

Those are important questions because attacks against the Bible come in every generation and we need to be ready for them.

For example, in recent decades, we heard of the Jesus Seminar where supposed scholars gathered to define what Jesus “really” said and did.

At least that’s what they said.

Of course, they were not eyewitnesses who lived during Jesus’ time, but they arrogantly decided they could vote on what was authentic.

And they ended up with ideas like no virgin birth, no miracles, no atoning death, and no bodily resurrection.

So they denied nearly everything that mattered about Jesus in the NT by claiming it was exaggerated and made up as some mythic tradition.

If you understand how such men operate, it’s easy to go back to the foundation from which they started—their presuppositions—and expect them to deny the true Jesus.

Their made-up historical Jesus was the result of their unbelief—they did not believe the Bible and so their goal from the outset was to invent a different Jesus that they could be more comfortable with.

But the Bible does not give that option because it comes from God as authoritative and has been preserved as trustworthy.

And today I want to give you some reminders to guard you against such arrogant foolishness that masquerades as scholarly expertise.

Don’t be intimidated when you watch Discovery Channel or the History Channel or read or hear or watch any other attack against the Bible that tries to get you not to believe it.

Romans 1:18 tells us that people naturally suppress the truth.

They don’t want the truth of the Bible proclaimed or believed because they know it brings them under God’s authority.

And people don’t want God’s authority because they want to define right and wrong and God and life on their own terms.

They want to cover their eyes and muffle their ears because they prefer sinning over facing reality.

That's how each of us is by nature as fallen, sinful humans and that dangerous, deceitful pull still tempts us even after we are redeemed.

So I don't want you to be discouraged from trusting the Bible because the issue first is always about presuppositions.

What we presuppose, the starting point where we begin, always influences and governs the answers we arrive at.

That means you need not be shaken when an unbeliever like Dan Brown writes twisted, blasphemous code about Jesus.

You need to know that such attacks are not new.

Satan began questioning and contradicting God's Word from the beginning in the Garden of Eden when he deceived Eve.

And he's been doing it through seductive enticements and proud intellectual entrapments in every century.

It's like the psychological establishment that continues to make up new labels for sin & discard old labels for different ones.

One assault on the Bible you've probably not heard unless you've lived awhile or read a lot of older books is the JEDP theory.

That unbelieving attack on the OT claimed it was a compilation of various traditions that each used different names for God.

And they claimed to have discovered how those tradition were woven together to produce one religion and lead people into following it.

But it was all based on unbelief and a rejection of the God of Scripture and a desire to pick apart God's Word in Scripture.

Yet like other attacks on the Bible that come and go, that JEDP theory came and went and you rarely hear about it today.

The Bible stood through that test as it has through the ages and it will stand the tests of our times too.

And I want you to be aware of the unbelief and arrogance that fuel such attacks and not be surprised when they arise.

But I also want you informed with why we can trust the Bible and how we got it and how it's been guarded & passed down.

I can't cover much in one message, but as we walk through Romans 16:22-24 I want to offer you 3 reasons to be encouraged about the Bible that we have handed down to us today.

Reason #1—be encouraged by how the Bible was given.

As we examine Romans 16:22, let's learn what Tertius meant & what Paul did and how this letter has come to us as God's Word.

That helps us, #1, be encouraged by how the Bible was given.

Read Romans 16:22 again as we get into its details. [READ]

Here we read a 1st person singular verb with a 1st person singular pronoun for emphasis next to a name, & then a 1st person singular participle describing the greeter as the writer.

And each appearance of the 1st person singular in verse 22 is not Paul.

But the use of the 1st person singular in verse 21—my fellow worker, my kinsmen—is clearly Paul just as were the 1st person singular descriptions of all his relationships with the Romans.

Phoebe, for example, in verses 1-2, had supported Paul's ministry.

And Prisca and Aquila, in verses 3-5, had risked their necks for Paul & had worked with him & hosted a church in their house.

So it's only reasonable to conclude that all the "my" statements in Romans 16 refer to Paul except in verse 22.

Verse 22 is clearly an aberration, clearly a straying from the normal pattern of what's being written and how and why.

It's also clearly different from the start of the letter where the writer is introduced as, "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called *as* an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God."

In verse 5 of chapter 1, Paul again referenced his apostleship.

So it would be ridiculous to conclude anything from the whole of this letter except that the Apostle Paul wrote it.

Paul was the author of what was said and written.

But then who is Tertius and what's he doing in Romans 16:22?

Since Paul didn't have any kids, it can't be his five-year-old coloring on his parchment and writing his name by it, right?

So it must be that Tertius was Paul's voice-activated software.

This was way before Siri, the Apple voice-activated servant.

This was Tertius, the voice-activated scribe of the Apostle Paul.

Tertius was a person who put on parchment what Paul prepared in his mind and proclaimed to be written down.

The scholarly term is amanuensis; Tertius was Paul's amanuensis.

It means Tertius's hand did the writing, but the word-for-word content came from Paul.

And that was often done and normal and expected and accepted in NT times for Scripture and for other documents.

So no one would freak out over reading this in NT times like we might be tempted to do today when this is not so prevalent.

But it was so common in Paul's time that it makes sense of the 4 times in other letters with something written by his hand.

For example, Galatians 6:11 records this—"See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand."

Some have speculated from Galatians that Paul had an eye problem that would have made big writing a proof of his authorship.

Similarly, Colossians 4:18 has a greeting in Paul's hand linked to a call to remember him in his imprisonment.

And his letter to Philemon has verse 19 in his own hand before assuring Philemon that he will pay what Onesimus owes.

So Paul often proved his authorship at the close of his letters.

2nd Thessalonians 3:17 gives an explanation of this practice.

2nd Thessalonians 3:17 says, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write."

If you ever wondered why those verses were important, now you know that they were part of proving the letter was from the Apostle Paul.

That proof of Paul's authorship was important, first because many people used scribes or secretaries for the actual writing down of what was dictated for a letter.

And secondly, Paul's authorship was important because Paul was a proven Apostle who had seen the risen Lord Jesus Christ and been sent out by Jesus and proven by miracles that he had done.

As we've said before, the signs, wonders, and powers that Paul did affirmed him as an apostle as 2nd Corinthians 12:12 noted.

Since God proved His messengers by signs & by fulfillment of prophecies, it was important to know what was from an Apostle.

Signing in his own hand was part of Paul proving that in other letters, but in Romans he took a different approach.

Perhaps because of the relationships that authenticated this letter delivered by Phoebe & affirmed Prisca & Aquila, this was different.

But Paul still did something to affirm his authorship at the end of the letter like he did at the end of those other letters.

This time he let the amanuensis write his own greeting—and this was the only time we find Paul allowing the personal touch of his scribe.

We might imagine the scene like this—Tertius was writing down what Paul said and he was offering greetings from his companions there like Timothy & Lucius & Jason & Sosipater.

And as he went to mention greetings from Tertius along with Gaius and others, Paul proposed that Tertius could extend his own greetings.

Perhaps Phoebe was there and affirmed that when she delivered the letter and it was cemented in history.

Tertius may have even intended to emphasize that the writing was in service of the Lord or in the power of the Lord.

His phrase “in the Lord” can modify his writing or his greeting, but either way he was viewing his life in relation to the Lord.

But to get back to why this verse should strengthen our faith in the Scriptures, notice how open Paul was with what he did.

There is not some code to identify and figure out.

There is not some shady scheme to cover the real author or to rationalize how it was done as if it was less than reliable.

No. It's all very simple & straightforward & open & honest.

You don't need a secret decoder pen or detective kit to get it.

And you certainly don't need supposed scholars 2000 years later voting with black or white marbles whether a section should be accepted or not.

So point #1—be encouraged by how the Bible was given.

The Bible was given by a transparent process of writing at times with the careful use of a secretary who recorded exactly what the author wanted.

And authorship by a proven prophet or Apostle was linked to the Scriptural document and it was recognized by those who received it.

Even with Luke and Mark there was a link to the Apostle Paul and Peter so that only with Hebrews are we left with uncertain authorship & yet that letter has always been seen as scriptural.

And again, when I say “seen as scriptural”, I don't mean that a bunch of guys in robes in a later century voted to give us the Bible we have.

I mean that the OT and NT documents were recognized as authentic in their times because God proved His spokesmen in those times by miracles or fulfilled prophecies or other work.

So even the church councils in history were not the final decision makers of what belonged and what did not.

They were merely affirming what was proven & recognized as they discussed the few questions that may have been raised.

And what was recognized about the scriptural documents is that they should be honored with that special, technical term “Scripture.”

In that sense, Scripture is a synonym for God’s Word.

And most of you know at least one verse where Scripture itself gives us a proper view of Scripture.

We could read Psalm 19 or 119 & consider the valued view of God’s Word revealed there and the various descriptions of it.

We could read through the many times where the Word of the Lord is said to appear or come to various people.

We could note how all throughout the Bible in Israel’s history and from Jesus’ own mouth, the books written by Moses are also equally said to have come from God and God’s mouth.

So the Law or what we call Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy are called God’s Word by other prophets and by Jesus.

And Jesus also mentioned the Prophets and the Psalms or writings, which are the other two categories of OT Scripture.

You can find Jesus’ high view of OT Scripture in Luke 24:44 when He was on the Emmaus road & in other texts where He explains Scripture.

And Jesus Himself obviously spoke with authority as is repeatedly recorded in the reactions of people to Him.

His authority is also seen in His own way of mentioning what was previously written and He said, “But I tell you”. [Matthew 5]

His words had authority & He connected that authority to God the Father who sent Him. [John 8:48; 12:49; 14:10]

So Jesus’ words about the OT and His own words remind us that we can trust the Bible as God’s Word to us.

And the verse you may have thought of defining Scripture as God’s inspired or breathed-out word is 2nd Timothy 3:16-17.

2nd Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

That refers to the Scripture Timothy learned from his believing Jewish mother and grandmother and the Scripture that was being given in the time of Jesus and the Apostles.

After saying that the prophetic word is more sure than experience, 2nd Peter 1:20-21 describes the divine origin of Scripture like this.

2nd Peter 1:19-21 says “know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

That’s how God gave His Word to people—He moved men to write what He wanted written.

That’s what Jesus promised would happen when the Spirit came to His Apostles in John 14:26 & 16:13.

You might say it like this—God used men as His voice-activated software for recording what He wanted to reveal.

Or you might say God used people kind of like Paul used Tertius as his scribe to write what he wanted written.

Of course, those analogies are too simple to describe how God used each human personality in the context of life to write what he wrote.

But God did move men to write what He wanted through their experiences & relationships & the result is God’s Word.

That's how we call Scripture "God's Word".

And that's a bit of what we call the doctrine of inspiration, that Scripture is inspired or breathed out by God.

And that gives us a third answer to the question in our title today.

Who wrote this anyway?

Well, Tertius was the hand that put it on parchment.

But Paul's was the mind that formulated the words used.

And God by the Holy Spirit was the power & source of the words & the thoughts & the truths that formulated in Paul's mind to be written.

So God wrote it by His Spirit through the Apostle Paul who used the hands of Tertius to write it down.

And that is our 1st reason to trust & treasure the Bible as God's Word.

Reason #1—be encouraged by how the Bible was given.

And by the way, if you wonder how we know Paul's letters were in that special category of Scripture, 2nd Peter 3:15-16 groups Paul's letters alongside the rest of the Scriptures.

So it was obvious that even Peter in his time viewed Paul's letters in the same category of Scripture as God's Word.

Now I need to move on, but I pray that is a helpful reminder to be encouraged #1, by how the Bible was given.

Next we're going to relate verse 23 to our view of Scripture even though the connection is not immediately apparent.

But read Romans 16:23 with me & I'll explain. [READ]

Here we have the last 3 names mentioned in Romans 16.

Gaius is the host to Paul and to the whole church, which probably means he was a man of some means because he had a home large enough to host not only a guest but also a gathering.

Having a host for the whole church implies that each local church did not have its own building.

That helped them think of church as people, but larger gatherings needed larger places to meet like the Temple steps at Jerusalem.

And that reminds us of the value of hospitality because of the fellowship that happens in our homes with other believers.

It also reminds us of the importance of large-hearted generosity by Christians like Gaius who have the means to do so.

Since Paul was writing from Corinth and he had mentioned baptizing a man named Gaius in 1st Corinthians 1:14, we can probably say this refers to the same man.

Others add that Acts 18:7 names Titius Justus as a worshipper of God with a house next to the synagogue where Paul went to after Jews mostly rejected him.

And they link Gaius with Titius Justus as the same person, which is possible but we can't know for certain.

But it is unlikely that this Gaius of Corinth is the same as the Gaius of Macedonia or the Gaius of Derbe mentioned in Acts 19:29 & 20:4.

And since Gaius was a common name, it is not likely that this is the same Gaius that the 3rd letter of John was written to.

Like Gaius, the next man named was also probably wealthy because he had a position kind of like a city manager or treasurer or steward.

That man, named Erastus, also had a common name and so it's not clear whether we can identify him with others in the NT.

Since this city official probably stayed in Corinth & did not travel to minister to Paul, he's probably not the Erastus of Acts 19:22.

And 2nd Timothy 4:20 mentions an Erastus who stayed in Corinth, possibly after travel, but again we can't be sure if that is the same Erastus as the one here in Romans 16:23.

But what we do know is that this Christian brother was a man with a significant office of responsibility in Corinth.

And it's even possible that he held another government position that is marked down in history by an inscription in a marble paving block that was found in Corinth in 1929.

That inscription dated to the 1st century & mentioned an Erastus with a different title that could have been by this same man in a different job.

Again, not enough evidence exists to be dogmatic in connecting the Erastus of Romans 16:23 with that man.

But we do know that Gaius & Erastus were two believers in Corinth who had a measure of wealth or occupational standing in the city.

Then lastly we find the brother Quartus mentioned sending greetings & we know nothing else about him.

Apparently nothing was noteworthy about Quartus, either because he was known or more likely because he was unknown.

That's how the early church was & that's how the church is & should be more than it is today—the church is people of all socioeconomic levels saved and brought together in Christ.

That's what we draw from these final 3 guys sending greetings.

People who are rich can be saved and people who are poor can be saved and they can come together in one family in Christ.

And so can people of high political office or unknown status & those with big homes & money or with small homes and little money.

That's the beauty of the body of Christ and it's the wonder of what the Gospel produces in the lives of people.

And to link that to our look at God's Word, that kind of transformation from all backgrounds is testimony of the power of the Word of God.

The Word of God can sink into the hearts of people from all cultures and incomes and ethnicities and eccentricities.

The Word of God is the tool the Spirit of God uses to awaken eternal life in the souls of people as 1st Peter explains.

So we can say as a 2nd reason today to trust and treasure the Bible—#2—be encouraged by what the Bible has produced.

We said, #1—be encouraged by how the Bible was given.

Then #2—be encouraged by what the Bible has produced.

Look at the lives of Gaius & Erastus & Quartus & of Christians around you & be encouraged by what the Bible has produced.

The Bible, taken and used by the Holy Spirit—has produced wondrous change and blessing and good fruit in people from all walks of life and all corners of the world.

So be encouraged by what the Bible has produced.

Then 3rdly & lastly—as a 3rd reminder to trust & treasure the Bible—be encouraged by how the Bible has been preserved.

#3—be encouraged by how the Bible has been preserved.

I make that point from the fact that verse 24 is in brackets in some modern translations or it's only a footnote or it's included but footnoted as questionable.

Here's the point—in the most ancient manuscripts, those that are the oldest and therefore are the closest in time to the original, verse 24 does not appear.

Of course, the numbering of the verses did not appear in the original either and that didn't appear until much later.

But the copies of the letter that date back closest to Paul's first copy to deliver by Phoebe do not contain the words of what we call verse 24.

And thus it is questionable whether they were in the original.

The reason it's noted is because verse 24 does appear in western manuscripts, meaning those of the western, Roman branch of the church in history.

And that's the branch in history that made the most copies in Greek and in other languages.

But more copies that are farther in time from the original is not as significant as older copies that are closer in time to the original.

Does that make sense?

It's like this—if you missed last week's sermon, would you rather hear about it from someone who heard it or from someone who heard from someone else who heard from someone else who heard it?

It's like that game where you sit in a circle and start by whispering a message to the person next to you and that person passes the message to the next person and on it goes around.

Would the whispered message be most trustworthy from the first person who heard it or from the person half-way around the circle?

Probably from the first person, right?

And that's why ancient manuscripts of Scripture are so valuable.

And it's also why verse 24 is not considered to be part of the original letter Paul wrote.

As well, some manuscripts have it after verse 27 so the fact that it moved around shows some confusion over it also.

And here's what that teaches us—we know what's in ancient manuscripts and we have a lot of them.

And we can compare them and compare ancient translations to gather a very clear picture of exactly what was in the original letter.

We don't have to guess and we don't have to listen to people who attack the Bible with ignorant claims that they can't trust it or that it was changed by people through time.

Those attacks are simply not true—they have no basis in fact.

The opposite is true—we have so many copies and translations of the NT that can be compared so carefully that 99.99 % certainty and accuracy can be had of what was original.

99.99% is amazing!

And the other 0.001% are tiny things that do not make any doctrinal difference so they should not create any doubt either.

God has thoroughly protected and preserved His Word for His people down through generations and centuries so we can know Him.

And when attacks against the OT mounted, amazingly He allowed the Dead Sea scrolls to be found from 1947-1956 to further authenticate the OT Scriptures from before Jesus' time.

The Dead Sea Scrolls contained OT Scripture from 100-200 years before Jesus walked on earth.

That's a long time ago and yet God had preserved His Word all through the ages.

That careful protection and passing on of the Bible is why we need not be bothered by verse 24 likely not being original to Romans.

It's not a big deal because we have the many copies and careful science of comparing those copies and we can be sure.

So the question of verse 24 gives us our 3rd reason to trust and treasure the Bible and not be intimidated when attacks come.

#3—be encouraged by how the Bible has been preserved.

We've seen #1—be encouraged by how the Bible was given; #2, be encouraged by what the Bible has produced; and #3, be encouraged by how the Bible has been preserved.

I pray you are encouraged that you can know what God wants you to know by reading His Word in the Bible.

How are you responding to that privilege?

God has given and preserved His Word for you and He produces amazing things through His Word.

What are you doing to study, understand, apply and obey it?

Do you treat your Bible like it is the Word of God?

Let's close by praying together that we will.