

2 *Does Paul's Long Acceptance in NT Prove God's Will?*

Hasn't God Implicitly Approved Our NT List?

Some raise an intriguing response to the entire notion of testing Paul's canonicity. If God intended for us to exclude Paul, why has it taken this long to address the issue? Would not God have corrected us earlier? If God is truly sovereign, then He would not have allowed this to happen. As Felgar says in the side-bar quote, "Is God not powerful enough to preserve the sanctity of His word?"

This has superficial appeal, but it is at odds with the Bible itself.

For example, if a correct argument, then no true book of the Bible could long be separate from the Bible. God would have to supernaturally intervene promptly to re-affix the lost book to where it belongs.

Yet, the story in 2 Kings 22:8 *et seq.* refutes that God's sovereignty works this way. The Book of Deuteronomy was originally part of the inspired writings of Moses. He wrote it by hand. Yet, it was put in a corner of the Temple. It was then forgotten and lost. No one had made a copy. For 300 years Temple practices deteriorated. These practices bore no resemblance to what Deuteronomy required. Then Deuteron-

"I have to believe God has protected His word throughout time from being tainted by fraud. Is God not powerful enough to preserve the sanctity of His word?"

Felgar, Calgary, Canada Nov. 9, 2004

omy was found in a corner of the Temple. King Josiah had it read aloud. He realized how far Temple practices had fallen below the Bible standard. He tore his clothes in repentance. Deuteronomy was re-affixed to canon. Reformation began.

Thus, the inspired book of Deuteronomy was lost for hundreds of years at great damage to the community. If God's sovereignty means He must act as we suppose, then how could He not have acted sooner in supernatural ways to preserve His word? Why would generations lack His revealed word? Apparently, God's sovereignty does not work in the way we assume. Rather, the Israelites had a responsibility not to "diminish" the Law given to them (Deut. 4:2). This meant, among other things, they had to preserve it properly *in back-up print copies*.

Furthermore, the Bible even tells us that inspired writings have been permanently lost. In 1 Chronicles 29:29, we read of three *inspired* writings which have been lost: "Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written [in] a *Book of Samuel* the Seer, and in the *Book of Nathan* the Prophet, and in the *Book of Gad* the Seer...." Adam Clarke admits these books are "now lost."

The Bible tells us the word *Seer* was the word used at one time to mean *Prophet*. (1 Samuel 9:9, "Beforetime in Israel...he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer" ASV.)

The way these three books are described, Chronicles intends for us to understand they are all written by true prophets. Clarke resolves the dilemma of how any prophetic work could be lost by asserting these were all uninspired, and not true prophets. Yet, that can only be based on (a) a willingness to deny the Bible's express claim that these were prophetic works and (b) a willingness to make an unsubstantiated pre-supposition about how God's sovereignty works. For the Bible says they are prophets/seers.

Thus, Clarke is obviously assuming that works described by the Bible as written by prophets nevertheless must be uninspired simply because these works are now lost.

Clarke is grounding this upon a presupposition that God's sovereignty would not allow a truly inspired work to be lost. This is pure supposition used to negate the plain meaning of the Bible itself. Chronicles clearly points to Nathan as a Prophet, and Gad and Samuel as Seers. To repeat, 1 Sam. 9:9 say the word *seer* has the same meaning as Prophet. The clear reading of Chronicles is that these *prophetic* titles were accurate. Thus, these three lost works were inspired by God because written by *true* Prophets. Otherwise the Bible would not have referred to them as such. Despite these works being prophetic, everyone must concede these three prophetic works have been lost. God's sovereignty did not protect us as we assume *it should*. Humans have *personal responsibility* to guard His word from loss.

What About the Dilemma Caused by the Ethiopian Christians' Inclusion of the Book of Enoch?

Furthermore, if we hold to the view that God's failure to block Paul's inclusion in canon means God approves Paul, we have a dilemma posed by the Book of Enoch. This is a book that has been included for 2000 years as inspired canon of the Ethiopian Christian Orthodox church. Ethiopia went through long periods of being run by Christian Kings. Its church body consists today of 20,000 churches in a land of 58 million. The Book of Enoch was also part of universal Christianity's canon until 363 A.D. It was actually quoted by Jude in our New Testament as the words of true prophecy (Jude 17). This gives strong support for the Ethiopian Christians' claim that the Book of Enoch belongs in canon.¹ However, in 363 at the Council of Laodicea, the Book of Enoch was dropped by the Roman Catholic Church from the canon list

for the 'Old Testament.' No explanation was offered. It then disappeared in the Western Church while it remained canon in the Eastern church.

If God's sovereignty works the way Paulinists suppose, and they reject the Book of Enoch as non-canonical (as they frequently do by saying 'canon is closed'), then they have a problem. They have to insist the Ethiopian Christians for 2000 years wrongly have *added* to Scripture. Likewise, the early universal Christian Church must have wrongfully treated the Book of Enoch as canon for over 300 years. Then if their position is that Christians in the early church and in Ethiopia have for long periods wrongfully *added* to Scripture, why cannot the Paulinists consider it possible that Paul's writings for 1,970 years were *added* wrongly to canon?² If you assume Enoch is non-canonical, God in His sovereignty allowed large communities (*i.e.*, Ethiopia & early universal Christianity) wrongfully to add the Book of Enoch for very long periods of time. So if Enoch was wrongfully added, then God for 2000 years has not yet intervened to correct the Ethiopians. Accordingly, the Paulinist must concede it is equally possible that a mistake was made about adding Paul to canon. If God did not prevent the Ethiopians from adding the Book of Enoch, there is no reason to believe God always prevents *human error* in assembling canon lists. Paulinists cannot infer our decisions on canon have God's sanction by the mere lapse of time or God's failure to act supernaturally.

-
1. Indeed, an argument exists that the Book of Enoch was wrongfully excluded in the West after 363 A.D. It is a book filled with Messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. For discussion, see *What About the Canonicity of the Book of Enoch?* (2005) available on-line at www.jesuswordsonly.com.
 2. This number of 1,970 years reflects the evidence that the earliest apostolic church known as The Poor (Ebionites) rejected Paul's writings from the 40s though 70 A.D. See Appendix B: *How the Canon Was Formed*.

If, on the other hand, Paulinists try to shift positions, and claim they now admit the Book of Enoch is canonical because Jude quotes it as prophetic, then they still have a similar dilemma. They would have to explain how God allowed the church of the West from 363 A.D. to the present era to *diminish* God's word by wrongfully excluding the Book of Enoch. God did not protect us in the West from a wrongful subtraction of the Book of Enoch from Scripture, contrary to how some suppose that God's sovereignty works.

Thus, regardless of how the Paulinist tries to escape the dilemma posed by the Book of Enoch, it defeats their position. The sovereignty of God does not dictate that He would prevent wrongful *addition* or wrongful *diminishment* of Scripture even for as long as 2000 years. God has left the question of canonicity in our hands. We can obey Him by *testing* claims that something is prophetic or we can *disobey* God and not test each book we add to His word. The history of the Book of Enoch proves God does not intervene to fix our errors. The fact we have a book that our Western tradition calls the New Testament does not prove God's agreement with our list.

Thus, we cannot infer a long presence of Paul in canon makes it *God's choice* rather than our own.

What About the Additions to the End of Mark's Gospel?

It is now recognized among most evangelical Christians that the verses after Mark 16:8 were improperly added. The last page of the folio in Greek was lost. In *The Westminster Study Edition of the Holy Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1948), the authors explain regarding this passage:

[T]his section is a later addition. The original ending appears to be lost. The best and oldest manuscripts of Mark end with ch. 16:8.

Beginning in the 400s, two different endings were employed after Mark 16:8. One is called the Longer Ending, which appears in the KJV. This includes a verse often used as a proof text that baptism is vital for salvation. We read in Mark 16:16: "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be condemned." Catholic authorities believe this section is canonical but admit the "vocabulary and style indicate it was written by someone other than Mark."

The other ending to Mark is known as the Shorter Ending. It exists in many other manuscripts and goes back in its tradition to the 400s as well, having been known to Jerome.³

Thus, from approximately 400 A.D. to our 20th Century, we have had an addition to Scripture that has gone undetected and treated as canon even though it was certainly written three hundred years after Mark died.

If God's sovereignty works the way we suppose, God would not have permitted this addition to Scripture all these centuries. If God's sovereignty must protect us as we assume, God certainly would not allow an addition on a point so crucial as salvation, misleading numerous souls that water baptism was essential for salvation. However, obviously God's sovereignty does not work in the way we suppose. A long period of our tradition to include something as canon does not prove it belongs in inspired canon.

3. For this background, see Notes to *New American Bible* at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/mark/mark16.htm> (last accessed 2005).

*Tradition Is Invalid Grounds To Justify A
Canon List*

This inference of canonicity from long acceptance, furthermore, violates Scripture itself. It is a lazy man's way to permit ongoing violation of God's commands. The fact is that the Bible presumes we can make mistakes in joining wrong books to canon. The Bible's command to not do so *assumes we can add a non-prophetic work to Scripture*. That is why God *imposes on us* the rigid tests to determine valid prophecy. Why else would such verses even exist in Deuteronomy chapters 4, 12-13 and 18 unless God intended for us to *exercise the decision of what to add to canon*? If God were going to do this work for us, He would not give us tests to do it ourselves. The commands would be pointless if we did not have to worry about them because God would anyway protect His word.

In fact, if God protected His word supernaturally, it would defeat God's purpose in allowing false prophets to even exist. God explains why He left it up to us to sift the true prophets from the false: it tests whether we love Him with our whole heart and mind. (Deut. 13:3.) If God sovereignly intervened, and prevented mistakes regarding false prophets, God would thereby avoid the tests of our faith that God expressly says is His intention. God uses such tests and trials to *strengthen*, not weaken, our faith. (James 1:3.)

We should also remember this Sovereignty of God argument was speciously used to resist the Reformation. The papacy argued, in effect: how could the church be so wrong on indulgences if for so long God permitted it to err? Luther in his *Epistle on Galatians* (1535) put his opponent's arguments this way: "Do you suppose that God would have left His Church floundering in error all these centuries?" Luther called this sophistry. Luther said it fundamentally misunderstands the correcting nature of Scripture itself *if applied*. Tradition means nothing. The true Bible text means everything, Luther replied.

Luther was correct. The false teacher will set up his teaching as a tradition that you must not allow others to contradict. To protect themselves, they will tell you to “avoid” or “stay away” from those who might bring correction to their doctrine. False teachers are afraid you will use Scripture to examine their teaching, claiming it is divisive and destructive of the faith of many. Of course it would be, because Scripture’s correcting nature is destructive of false faiths. Rather than avoid others who come with doctrines contrary to what you believe, Apostle John tells you to try them whether they are from God (*i.e.*, compare them to God’s word):

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but ***prove the spirits, whether they are of God***; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. (1 John 4:1.)

You are to remain engaged in a dialogue with those whom you share disagreement. You can never know you have the truth if your teacher/leader frightens you to “avoid” or “stay away” from others who have different teachings. Only false prophets/teachers can benefit from instilling such fear among Christians.

Thus, tradition means nothing. The Sovereignty of God idea that makes tradition into dogma rests upon a false assumption of how God *should* protect His canon supernaturally. The Bible only supports that God expects us to protect and guard His word after delivered to us. We cannot avoid applying the tests of Deuteronomy chapters 4, 12-13 and 18 of what constitutes a false prophet on the assumption that God will always intervene to prevent erroneous inclusion of books into canon. A long period of acceptance by a large group of Christians proves nothing about God’s divine plan. The history attached to the Book of Enoch for 2000 years stands as a constant reminder of the folly of such a notion, whether one believes Enoch is canonical or not.

*Luther & Calvin Both Rejected the
Sovereignty of God Argument on Canon
Inclusion*

Finally, both Luther and Calvin would reject the idea God's sovereignty has protected the New Testament canon for all these thousands of years. They both claimed various books that now have been attached for 2000 years to the NT canon were erroneously included. Thus, nothing put forth in the JWO proposition runs afoul of the Sovereignty of God, even as Luther and Calvin understood that doctrine.

First, Luther in his 1522 *Preface to the New Testament* clearly said two books do not belong in the New Testament canon: the Book of Revelation and the Epistle of James. Luther said he could not see "the Holy Spirit" in the Book of Revelation. (See *infra* page 370.) As to James' Epistle, because it "contradicts Paul," Luther said it could not possibly be inspired. (See page 248 *infra*.) Luther printed both books as part of his New Testament simply for historical reasons. Thus, Luther did not regard almost 2000 years of inclusion *ipso facto* proves inspiration. Luther rejected the idea that God's sovereignty implies approval of our New Testament list on the assumption God would not have delayed so long to fix things.

Likewise, Calvin insisted that Second Peter was wrongfully included in canon. (See *infra* page xix of Appendix B.) The Second Epistle of Peter has a verse that troubled Calvin's doctrine of predestination. This probably motivated Calvin's antagonistic viewpoint. Regardless of Calvin's motives, Calvin's position is valid. The inclusion of Second Peter is one of the most universally recognized flaws in the New Testament. This epistle was never recognized fully in any canon list until 367 A.D. It was expressly rejected by Eusebius in 325 A.D. as a pseudograph. It has several internal evidences of its pseudograph nature. Thus, Calvin's view was legitimate.

More important, Calvin's view proves Calvin did not regard almost 2000 years of inclusion *ipso facto* proves inspiration. God's sovereignty does not imply approval merely by God not having supernaturally intervened for 2000 years to reassemble the canon list.

Thus, even though Calvin and Luther surely would not want Paul excluded from canon, both Calvin and Luther would concede it is correct to test Paul's canonicity. There is no presumption that Paul belongs in the NT list merely by passage of time and a long tradition. The Bible demands testing Paul's inclusion by *humans*. The Bible sets forth those tests we *humans* are to apply. However, we *humans* love to shirk responsibility by attributing all events that support our errors to God. However, our Lord does not tolerate such a lazy servant. Let's get to work now and do the job that God commanded us to do: test Paul.

*Regardless, The Earliest Tradition
Excluded Paul as Inspired Canon*

Furthermore, the actual history of canon formation suggests God did tell the early Church that Paul was uninspired. The Ebionites of 65 A.D. asserted Paul was an apostate because of his position on the Law of Moses. The Ebionites insisted Paul's writings must be deemed heretical. Only the Hebrew version of Matthew's Gospel should be canon. (No other NT writing yet existed in 65 A.D.) The evidence strongly suggests that *Ebionites* was a term used for the Apostolic Jerusalem Church under James. The word *Ebionites* is an Hebraism meaning *The Poor*. Paul twice refers to collecting funds for *The Poor* at Jerusalem. However, this link between *The Poor* at Jerusalem and the *Ebionites* was obscured in our New Testament by printing *the poor* in lowercase letters and not transliterating it to Hebrew as *Ebionites*.⁴

Next, Paul was expressly identified by recognized Christian leaders as uninspired when Marcion caused a crisis in 144 A.D. Marcion insisted Paul alone had the true gospel, not the *twelve apostles*. In response, the early universal Christian church said Paul is *not* an inspired author. This is clearly set forth in Tertullian's *Against Marcion* from 207 A.D.⁵

Thus, from 65 A.D. to 207 A.D., God apparently did tell the church through James and Tertullian to reject Paul as lacking inspiration. God did not leave us ignorant. We may have simply chosen to ignore God's early messages through His agents. However, there is no time like the present to make amends for errors in our past. We must stop trying to shift responsibility to God for our decisions when we fail to obey God's commands to test the words of alleged prophets.

Historical Note: Has Adding An Edifying Work To Canon Ever Been Mistaken As Proof of Inspiration?

Tertullian in *Against Marcion* (207 A.D.) thought Paul's words should be treated as edifying rather than as inspired material. Unfortunately, this original purpose for reading Paul along with the Gospels was forgotten in the ensuing centuries. Has the notion of *inspired* canon ever been shaped by a misunderstanding of the original intent in joinder? Yes. A similar oversight led Catholics in 1546 to decree the Apocrypha was inspired. However, when it was added to canon eleven centuries earlier, it was solely as *edifying but non-inspired* material. Catholic scholars now recognize that the original purpose of adding the Apocrypha to canon was forgotten over time. Its joinder originally did not mean to imply it was *inspired* material. Yet, confusion set in and now it is regarded as inspired material by Catholic authorities.⁶

4. See *infra* page 298 (evidence why Ebionites were the Jerusalem Church under James).

5. For extensive quotations from Tertullian, see *page 408 et seq.*

6. Has overlooking Tertullian's writings on Paul led to a crucial misunderstanding on Paul's supposed inspiration? A similar lapse in memory happened among Catholics regarding Jerome's view of the Apocrypha which he combined with the inspired Bible text. The Apocrypha represented seven books within the Vulgate Bible prepared by Jerome in 411 A.D. Why did Jerome include this section? Jerome in a commentary on Solomon explained the Apocrypha was "for the edification of the people, not for the authoritative confirmation of doctrine." However, **the memory of Jerome's original purpose faded in time**. In 1546, the Catholic Council of Trent affirmed the Apocrypha as sacred, and it belonged to the Bible. The Apocrypha still is considered an official inspired portion of the Catholic Bible. Thus, the memory of the purpose of joining a *noninspired* writing to *inspired* texts was, after eleven centuries, forgotten. However, the scholars who wrote the "Canon" article for the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* concede what really happened: "The latter [*i.e.*, the Apocrypha] he [Jerome] judged were circulated by the Church as **good spiritual reading** but were not recognized as authoritative Scripture. The situation remained unclear in the ensuing centuries...." Thus, in other words, such **close association** between *edifying* material and *inspired* material **caused confusion** among Catholic authorities over the centuries. Meanwhile, Catholics later adopted doctrines about Purgatory that solely had support in the Apocrypha. Hence, it became embarrassing for Catholicism to later eject this section as *noninspired*. And thus it stands. A joinder to edify the reader became conclusive proof the writing was inspired! Yet, we cannot judge the Catholics too harshly for this error. **It appears identical to what we did with Paul**. If Tertullian was a voice of orthodoxy on Paul, as it appears he most certainly was, then as of approximately 200 A.D., the church which *first* added Paul to canon close in time must have done so with Tertullian's views in mind. This would mean that such close association of Paul with *inspired* canon later caused us confusion. The early church's original purpose became "unclear [to us] in the ensuing centuries...." Then we, like the Catholics, superimposed our belief system about what *canon* means today on a prior era which viewed canon quite differently. This is apparently how Paul went from an edifying writer who had virtually no impact on doctrine in both the Eastern and Western church for fifteen centuries (see page 425 *et seq.*) to a figure today whose every word is now hung upon by many as inspired text. Also, this episode of how the Apocrypha went from edifying material to inspired writ should remind us that **the concept of canon has varied over time**. We must not regard the mere fact something was joined as *canon* for centuries as proof that the item is anything more than *reading material* in church. Only if a writing is objectively prophetic material can it stand on its own and be deemed validly inspired.