

Introduction to the Marcionite Bible

by Melissa Elizabeth Cutler

1 Contents

<u>1 Contents.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>2 Introduction.....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>3 The Marcionite Bible.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>4 The Inadequacies of Manuscript Evidence.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>5 Evidence of Editorial Tampering.....</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>The Homophobic Passage in Romans Chapter 1.....</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>The Misogynistic Passage in 1 Corinthians Chapter 11.....</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>The Pastoral Epistles.....</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>Luke and the Marcionite Gospel.....</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>6 Implications.....</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Who added this material, why, and when?.....</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Can similar corruption and forgery be found elsewhere in the New Testament?.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Was the Marcionite Bible Perfect, or is that too corrupt?.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Could an inserted passage contain valuable teaching in spite of being fraudulent?....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>To what extent does corruption in the bible undermine Christian beliefs?.....</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>7 Conclusions.....</u>	<u>14</u>

2 Introduction

In *The History of the Christian Bible*¹, I provided evidence that the key individuals who influenced the content of the Bible were spiritually corrupt, and so we should be wary of trusting the Bible that they gave us. In that article I did not attempt to examine the contents of the Bible itself, or expose any specific corrupt passages; that is a task that I now take up in this article.

In this article I will provide evidence that the New Testament is corrupt, and that additional passages were fraudulently added to it. Many of those extra passages were added to the epistles of Paul, and they introduce false teaching on a range of subjects, including:-

- the role and status of women,
- homophobia,
- the concept of original sin,
- the idea that God predestines our actions, in a sense causing sin,
- the idea that God tortures people for eternity in hell
- Anti-Semitism,
- hate speech directed against pagans.

This article is structured into the following sections:

- In section three I will discuss a different Bible that existed in ancient times and was read by a group called the Marcionites; this consisted only of a set of epistles of Paul, and one gospel which was similar to *Luke*; these were very different to the traditional version of the same books.
- In section four I will discuss the manuscript evidence on which knowledge of the traditional New Testament rests; I will highlight the inadequacies of the available manuscripts.
- In section five I will present evidence that, contrary to popular belief, the Marcionite version of the epistles of Paul was the original, and that *Luke* is a corrupt form of the *Marcionite Gospel*. I will show that the Catholics corrupted their copies of the text by adding false passages; when the Protestant and Orthodox churches broke away from the Catholics they continued to read from the same corrupt documents.

1 Available online: www.Original-Bible.com/History-of-Bible.pdf

3 The Marcionite Bible

The Marcionites are among the earliest of Christian groups; their movement probably came into existence in the early second century. They were one of the largest and most widespread groups, until the fourth century. In the fourth century the Catholics gained political influence and the Catholic Roman emperors began persecuting and exterminating all other faiths (including the Marcionite Christians). This period of history is discussed in detail in the article *The History of the Christian Bible*², though I did not focus specifically on the Marcionites.

The contents of the Marcionite bible was established sometime in the early to mid second century, a full two centuries before the Catholics established the contents of their Bible.

The Marcionites believed that only Paul had fully understood the message of Jesus, and they considered only his writings to be scripture. Their bible consisted of one gospel (similar to *Luke* but significantly shorter) and a set of Paul's epistles (also significantly shorter than the conventional version). As far as it is known, no copies of the Marcionite Bible have survived to modern times³; however several of the early Catholic writers quoted from it extensively when they wrote books arguing against Marcionite teachings. They also described the differences between the Marcionite texts and their own. It is therefore possible to reconstruct the Marcionite bible by comparing these quotes and descriptions with the traditional version of *Luke* and the epistles of Paul.

The reconstruction process is not perfect, not every passage of the Marcionite bible has been quoted; however the two versions of the documents were very similar to one another in most places and so the gaps between quotes can be filled using passages from the conventional text. Tertullian (an influential ancient Catholic) wrote an entire commentary on the Marcionite bible to argue against their beliefs; Epiphanius (another ancient Catholic) also quoted numerous statements from it. Both of these writers went out of their way to describe significant differences between the Marcionite text and their own, and so for passages which have not been quoted it is likely that the two versions were identical anyway.

Both then and now, the church has claimed that the Marcionite bible was corrupt, and that Marcionites removed passages that contradicted their beliefs. In the following two sections I will critically examine this claim. I will present evidence that in reality, it was the early Catholics who added extra passages to create their version of the Pauline epistles, and the *Gospel of Luke*.

2 Available online: www.Original-Bible.com/History-of-Bible.pdf

3 Small fragments of the Marcionite bible are, in most cases, indistinguishable from fragments of the Catholic version of the same document (unless the fragment happens to bridge one of the absent passages). I have not yet had the time to do research on the possibility that some of the fragments uncovered by archaeology may in fact be unidentified Marcionite fragments.

4 The Inadequacies of Manuscript Evidence

There are many Christian apologists who make unrealistic claims about New Testament manuscripts dating to within a century of the time of the apostles; these claims are to be treated with scepticism. In reality the oldest surviving New Testament manuscripts date to approximately 200AD⁴.

The two oldest surviving manuscripts of the Pauline epistles are known as P32 and P46. P32 is a small fragment of *Titus*, containing verses 1:11-15 on one side, and 2:3-8 on the reverse. P46 is a collection of Pauline epistles containing large portions of *Romans*, *Hebrews*, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, *Ephesians*, *Galatians*, *Philippians*, *Colossians* and *1 Thessalonians*. There is a consensus among scholars that both of these manuscripts date to around 175-225AD.

We know from the writings of the early Catholics, that the Marcionites and their version of the epistles of Paul existed long before this date. The surviving manuscripts therefore provide us with no relevant information about which version was the original. Even if we did have manuscripts that pre-date the split between the Marcionites and the Catholics we would still not have definitive evidence of which version of the text was the original, as in all probability both versions of the text existed in Christian communities long before either movement became aware of the other and formally broke away from each other.

Examination of ancient manuscripts is a very valuable tool for identifying and removing the scribal errors that accumulated in later centuries, however it is not possible address the question of deliberate corruption of the text by this method; **deliberate alteration to the text is only likely to occur during the formative phase of a religion; for Christianity this is the 1st century, pre-dating all surviving manuscripts.** The bible itself states that deliberately fraudulent versions of the gospels and epistles existed even during the lives of the apostles⁵; it is the lingering influence of this very early corruption that I wish to examine and expose. Third century manuscripts are of no value at all.

4 There is one tiny fragment of John which is older than this. It dates to the early 2nd century, and is know as “P52” or “the John Rylands fragment”; it contains 5 partial verses of text.

5 For example Paul urged those who received his letters to examine the hand writing of the letter to judge whether or not it was genuine:

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.

2 *Thessalonians* 3:17, see also *1 Corinthians* 16:21, *Galatians* 6:11 and *Colossians* 4:18.

5 Evidence of Editorial Tampering

Fortunately there is another tool that can be used to identify whether the Marcionite or Catholic version of the epistles of Paul was the original. Ancient epistles were written with a well ordered structure. Like a modern essay they started with an introduction, and background information that the reader needed to be aware of; then they lead the reader through a series of points in a logical order towards a conclusion at the end, they would also contain customary greetings and sections that exhort the reader to take a particular course of action.

If an editor made substantial alterations it would drastically damage this structure. The addition or removal of a large block of text would leave the document disjointed, with abrupt and unexpected jumps to a different subject. When writing an essay a writer will often refer back to their previous points as they built conclusions on the ideas they had already explained. The removal of one passage is therefore likely to undermine later passages, making them unintelligible.

On the other hand, if a large block of text were added by an editor it would leave the text disjointed in different ways. The flow of thought is likely to jump abruptly to a new subject (addressing the agenda of the editor) and then jump back again to the train of thought of the original writer. The extra text would often also show a different writing style to the rest of the epistle.

When we compare the two versions of the documents side by side, we should see signs of editorial tampering. We should expect these signs to be obvious for two reasons:

- 1) The differences between the Marcionite and traditional versions of the documents were huge. In many places entire chapters are absent from the Marcionite version. In total the Marcionite version of the epistles of Paul are approximately 30% shorter than their traditional counterparts.
- 2) The editor responsible for these differences would not have been thinking about the mess he was making of the structure of the document, nor would he have been thinking about what scholars would make of his handiwork 2000 years later. His only concern would have been the spiritual needs of his congregation. It is hard to imagine an editor going to great lengths to cover their tracks.

To summarise: one version should be coherent, clear, well structured and consistently written in the same style. The other should be a mutilated mess. This is precisely what we see when we compare the Marcionite version with the conventional versions of the bible; this will become obvious as we examine a number of passages in detail.

The Homophobic Passage in *Romans* Chapter 1

Let us now look at a passage from the Marcionite version of *Romans**; the corresponding passage in the traditional bible is *Romans* 1:16 to 2:8:

I am not ashamed of the Gospel,
for it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe,
to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
For in it the righteousness of God is revealed,
beginning and ending in faith.
Wrath from heaven is also revealed,
on the impiety and unrighteousness of men,
who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
And we know that the judgment of God is on the basis of truth.

The Marcionite version of *Romans**.

There are a number of differences between the texts; the most significant is that the traditional version of *Romans* contains an entire half a chapter (*Romans* 1:19-2:1) sandwiched between the last two lines of the text above, *Romans* 2:3-8 was also absent from the Marcionite version. The extra text is a long diatribe of condemnation and judgement directed against pagans (verse 1:21). Paganism is said to cause gay and lesbian sexual acts (1:22-27); such people are said to be filled with all kinds of evil (1:29-31), and worthy of death (1:32).

In the past, many people who have studied the differences between the two versions of the Epistles of Paul have attempted to settle the question of which version were authentic purely by asking the question “Would a Marcionite have been motivated to make changes to the text?” There are several verses in *Romans* 1:19-2:1 that contradict Marcionite beliefs, so following this line of reasoning one might conclude that the conventional version is the original, and that a Marcionite editor removed material from their copies. Such a line of reasoning is not balanced; the possibility that a Catholic scribe or editor might have had a reason to add the extra text has been ignored, and because of this the argument in favour of the conventional version of this passage is very weak.

In order to formulate a strong argument, we must consider two hypotheses to account for the differences between these two versions of the text; we can then evaluate both against the evidence and see which is most probable:

Scenario 1: A Marcionite scribe or editor removed the extra text.

Scenario 2: A Catholic scribe or editor added the extra text.

As already discussed, a Marcionite scribe or editor would indeed have had a motivation to remove text from *Romans* if the conventional version had been the original; however, a Catholic scribe or editor would also have had a motivation to add the extra text if the

* I am quoting from my own reconstruction of the Marcionite version of *Romans*. This is currently unfinished, but a partial copy can be found online:

www.Marcionite-Scripture.info/Marcionite_Bible.htm

Marcionite version is the original. Many people assume that the conventional version of Romans was widely circulated in Catholic circles long before the Marcionite version even existed, however proper examination of the evidence does not support this view⁶.

The motivation of a scribe to add this extra material to the conventional version of Romans is easy to explain. The word “suppress” in the third line above (also in verse 1:18 of the conventional *Romans*) has been translated from the Greek word “κατεχοντων”. Though this word means “suppress” in this context, this is a rare and slightly idiomatic use of the word. It’s more common and literal meaning is to hold captive or possess someone or something. An ancient reader could easily fail to grasp the unusual and metaphorical use of the language (especially if Latin was their first language rather than Greek); they would then think that Paul was saying that in some sense the unrighteous “possess” the truth. When confronted with a confusing text a scribe would often add some extra material to explain and interpret the text for their readers. In *Romans* 1:19 onwards this is precisely what we see, an explanation of how the unrighteous could be said to “possess” the truth: “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made...”

Yet this isn’t relevant to verse 1:18; when correctly interpreted in that context “κατεχοντων” does not mean “possess”. Verse 1:18 uses “κατεχοντων” with one meaning and verse 19 refers back to it as though it meant something else; **verse 19 only makes sense if one has misunderstood the previous verse - and its hard to imagine the original author making a mistake like that!**

As I have already mentioned, a Marcionite scribe might also have been motivated to remove the extra text if the conventional version had been the original; however, unlike the Catholic editor scenario, there is no evidence in the text suggesting that this did actually happen. Notice how these two sentences fit together like pieces of a jigsaw:

Wrath from heaven is also revealed, on the impiety and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [*Romans* 1:19-2:1 supposedly removed from here]
And we know that the judgement of God is on the basis of truth.

We would expect the removal of a large chunk of text to leave the passage disjointed and garbled, but the flow of thought is perfect and fluid as we move from the first sentence to the second. In the traditional version, these two sentences come just before and just after the section of text that Marcion supposedly disliked. If we are going to believe that the conventional text is the original, then how can we explain the perfect link up of two sentences that are separated by half a chapter? It’s as though Paul knew in advance that the Marcionites would want to remove that passage, and deliberately worded his epistle so that their future text look like the original!

Let us now look at the writing style. The difference in style and tone between the extra text (*Romans* 1:19-2:1 and 2:2b-8) and the surrounding passages is so obvious that it can be seen even in an English translation. Paul’s style is fast, fluid and elegant; his

⁶ See another of my articles: *Origin of the Marcionites*, section 5.

message is powerful and dramatic. The Marcionite version of the text is consistently written in that style. The extra passages that are found only in the traditional version have a much slower and more meditated tone; they frequently dwell on negativity and often have a tone of condemnation (this passage is a perfect example). If you compare the tone of *Romans* 1:19-2:1 and 2:2b-8 with *Romans* 1:8-18 you will see what I mean (you will need to be using a fairly precise literal translation, not a paraphrase like *The Message*). This change in tone and style fits perfectly with the “Catholic editor” scenario. It does not fit in so well with the “Marcionite editor” scenario; why would Paul use one writing style in the passages that the Marcionites would later like, and switch to a different writing style when writing the passages that the Marcionites would dislike. If we are going to believe that the Marcionites corrupted their version of this passage we must imagine that Paul anticipated Marcion’s alterations, and deliberately used a different writing style to make Marcion’s version look like the original.

Let us now look at how this passage fits into the structure of the epistle as a whole. This passage is an introduction section to the epistle; it introduces the Gospel message that Paul will explain in more detail throughout the rest of *Romans*. The introduction is hardly an appropriate place to devote such an enormous amount of text to the discussion to such obscure details. The key purpose of *Romans* is to explain that faith alone is the path to salvation; and that works are the result rather than the cause of knowing God. We would expect the introductory passage to introduce this theme and then quickly lead the reader into a development of Paul’s thoughts on the subject. (Why and how is this “wrath” revealed from heaven? What is this “truth” by which God will judge?) In the Marcionite version of *Romans* this is precisely what we see; the introduction passage is closely followed by passages which build on those concepts (*Romans* 2:12-16). In the traditional version of *Romans* the introduction passage is no longer fresh in the readers mind when they reach that part of the epistle; they have been lead down a different line of thought by the added passages and so it is now much harder to follow Paul’s message.

Summary of *Romans* chapters 1 and 2: We have considered two scenarios; in one scenario a Catholic editor started with a (proto-)“Marcionite” version of the text, and added material to create the traditional version of *Romans*; in the other scenario the Marcionites started with the conventional version of the text and deleted material to create the Marcionite version of *Romans*. We have evaluated these two scenarios by looking at wording, writing style and the structure of the two versions; in all three of these areas we have found evidence that support the “Catholic editor” scenario, and undermine the credibility of the “Marcionite editor” scenario.

However chapters 1 and 2 of *Romans* are just the tip of the iceberg. I am in the process of reconstructing the Marcionite version of *Romans*, and when I have finished I plan to write a commentary on it, in which I will compare every passage of the two versions side by side. Similar evidence to that which we have seen here will be seen again and again throughout the epistle. The traditional epistles of Paul are so heavily edited that the text has become disjointed, and jumps randomly from topic to topic⁷. This disjointed

⁷ For example look at the way *Romans* 9:1 jumps to a new topic completely unrelated to the previous chapters; *Romans* 13:1 is another example.

text makes it hard for ordinary readers to follow, and so simple bible study is very confusing for many people, and often becomes a highly intellectual exercise (people often attend courses just to gain a basic understanding of the themes of each book). Christian apologists have attempted explain this by suggesting that Paul was a clumsy writer, and that he may not have had a good grasp of Greek. However, in places where the traditional version is identical to the Marcionite version the text is written with a fluid elegance that is almost poetic. The Marcionite text also had a logical and consistent structure throughout. **It is hard to imagine that the Marcionites improved the structure of the word of God, simply by deleting the bits they didn't like!**

My reconstruction of the Marcionite version of *Romans* is not yet finished, so we cannot examine any more passages from them at this time (we will come to the *Marcionite Gospel* shortly). However it is possible to identify some fraudulently inserted passages purely by looking at the traditional version of the text.

The Misogynistic Passage in 1 Corinthians Chapter 11

A second example of a fraudulent insertion can be found in *1 Corinthians*. Below is *1 Corinthians* 11:2-11:22; however, 14 and a half verses are absent from this quotation of the text:

Now **I commend you** because you remember me in everything⁸ **But in the following instructions I do not commend you**, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? **Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.**

If you compare this with the text in *1 Corinthians* 11:2b-16 you will see that the extra 14 and a half verses do not fit in with the flow of the text, and are not in any way related to the topics that the surrounding passages discuss. If Paul wrote the whole thing, then he must have wanted to deliberately make it look like those 14 verses are fraudulent.

For a few other simple examples of fraudulent passages, you can look at:

- *1 Corinthians* 14:34-36 - More misogyny: "the women should keep silent in the churches, but should be in submission... Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?"
- *1 Timothy* 1:9-10 - More homophobia
- *1 Thessalonians* 2:15-16 - Anti-Semitism

These examples of insertions are fairly obvious, little needs to be said to explain that they are corrupt. Try reading the surrounding text as though the passages listed above

⁸ *1 Corinthians* 11:2b-16 was inserted here. This is the passage which says that women are made in the "image and glory of man" rather than God (verse 7).

were absent and you will see that the text flows much more smoothly than it does when they are included.

The Pastoral Epistles

The biggest difference between the Marcionite collection of Pauline epistles and the traditional collection is that the Marcionites rejected *1 Timothy*, *2 Timothy* and *Titus*. These three are known as the Pastoral Epistles; they are very similar to one another in their style, tone and content, but very different from the rest of the epistles of Paul. Modern scholars have reached a consensus that these three epistles are forgeries, the only scholars who belong to the more fundamentalist branches of Christianity; one must question whether the judgements of such people are genuinely based on evidence.

Luke and the Marcionite Gospel

For evidence of corruption in *Luke* you may wish to look at *Luke* 11:1-13. In this passage Jesus teaches his disciples the Lord's Prayer, then in verses 5-12 he explains those who pray persistently will always get what they ask for. The context indicates that this is in relation to general requests for the things we need in life, such as "our daily bread" (verses 3, 5, 11-12). Then very abruptly in verse 13 (the final verse in the passage) the topic of the Holy Spirit is introduced; this makes no sense since the passage has not been talking about spiritual needs, but physical ones.

In the Marcionite version of this passage there is a tiny difference that changes the context and the meaning of the entire passage. In the Marcionite version the Lord's Prayer starts with a request for the Holy Spirit; this means that the reader will unambiguously interpret the metaphors which follow as relating to requests for spiritual "bread" rather than just literal bread. The statement "knock and the door shall be opened to you" also makes perfect sense because entry into the kingdom of heaven is a clear theme of the passage. The closing statement: "how much more will your heavenly father give the holy spirit to those who ask him?" no longer confuses the reader or makes them re-interpret passages that they have already read, rather it flows perfectly within a clear theme that has already been established by the previous verses.

Finally here is another passage from the Marcionite gospel:

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. A woman was standing behind, who was a sinner. Standing at his feet she washed his feet with her tears and anointed them and kissed them. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

"A moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed

my feet with her tears and anointed and kissed them. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

*The Marcionite Gospel*⁹, compare with *Luke 7:36-50*

If you compare this passage with *Luke 7:36-50* you will notice that there is no difference in spiritual or moral content. However the minor difference in wording makes this passage very interesting none the less. You are probably very familiar with the story in which a woman washes Jesus' feet with her tears, and dries them with her hair; so familiar in fact that you probably read that interpretation into the Marcionite version of the passage, without noticing that the Marcionite version does not say anything of the sort. In the Marcionite version of the passage the phrase “she washed his feet with her tears” is a figure of speech; the woman was on the floor at Jesus' feet sobbing uncontrollably, but there is no literal foot washing taking place.

It is impossible to imagine a motive for the Marcionites to alter this passage, and turn a literal scene into a figure of speech; there was certainly nothing in the passage which challenged their beliefs. On the other hand, if the Marcionite version was the original it is easy to see why a scribe would make the reverse changes. As in *Romans 1*, it appears that a scribe with poor knowledge of Greek misunderstood the metaphoric use of language, and mistakenly thought the figure of speech was literal. He then sought to clarify and explain the text by adding extra material, explaining and describing the confusing scene to his readers.

The Marcionite version of the text is more natural. How and why would a woman who was sobbing uncontrollably, calmly and methodically wash and dry Jesus' feet? The behaviour is bizarre; yet in *Luke*, none of the individuals in the scene react to, or comment on, this inexplicable behaviour. Elsewhere in the gospels when strange or miraculous things take place the gospel writers record the reaction of the people (e.g. *Mark 2:12, 3:6, 4:41, 5:14*); our clumsy editor, writing from imagination rather than memory, omits this detail.

Comparisons of several more passages from the Marcionite and traditional versions of the bible can be found here:

www.hermann-detering.de/couch_engl.htm

www.Marcionite-Scripture.info/CW_2.htm

The *Marcionite gospel* has traditionally been referred to as the “*Gospel of Marcion*”, reflecting the traditionally held belief that it was created by Marcion (founder of the Marcionite movement) in the second century. Having presented evidence that in reality Marcion's version was the original version, and so probably preceded Marcion himself by decades, the name “*Gospel of Marcion*” no longer seems appropriate. I will instead call it the “*Marcionite Gospel*”. The Marcionites themselves called it “*The Gospel of the*

9 In this passage black text is used in places where Epiphanius and Tertullian quoted the passage, the grey text indicates places where I have used the traditional text (*Luke*) to fill in the gaps between the quotes. When we examined *Romans* earlier, all of the text that I quoted from the Marcionite version was text that has survived with word for accuracy in the quotes of Tertullian.

Lord” or simply “*The Gospel*” (since they didn’t have any others).

6 Implications

Manuscript evidence does not allow us to draw conclusions about whether the Marcionite or the Catholic version of the Epistles of Paul and was the original; however, analysis of the texts themselves for signs of editing definitively rules in favour of the Marcionite version for large numbers of passages. This conclusion immediately raises a number of additional questions:

- Who added this extra material, why and when?
- Can similar corruption and forgery be found in other parts of the traditional New Testament?
- Is the Marcionite version of the gospel and Epistles of Paul perfect, or do these text too contain corrupt passages?
- Could an inserted passage or forged epistle contain valuable Christian teaching in spite of being forged?
- To what extent does all of this undermine traditional Christian beliefs?

I will attempt to provide brief answers to these questions now, and direct the interested reader to some articles that contain a more thorough discussion.

Who added this material, why, and when?

Of course it will never be possible to know precisely who the forger(s) was (or were); but we can investigate their agenda, motivation and the probable time at which it occurred. The Epistles of Paul themselves describe a conflict between Paul's Gospel of grace, and the Jewish-Christian (or Ebionite) teaching of salvation by works of the law. One possible explanation is that those preachers who opposed Paul had a lingering influence on the Gentile Christian communities; the copies of the Epistles of Paul in some areas would then have been altered in an attempt to make them more compatible with the message of the Ebionites; many of the inserted passages fit well with this agenda. Meanwhile presumably there were areas where most Christians remained true to the pure Pauline Gospel, and retained more authentic copies of his epistles. In the second century, areas where Christians had combined elements of Ebionite beliefs with elements of Pauline belief became fertile ground for the spread of "Catholicism", whilst the Marcionite movement was able to spread in regions that had remained truer to Paul's message; thus I believe the Marcionites propagated a version of the Epistles of Paul's that was older than their movement. This is a theory that I outline in the article *The Root of the Corruption*; available online.

Another approach is to interpret these statements about the conflict between the Jewish Christians and Pauline Christians metaphorically as references to the disputes between the early Catholics and Marcionites. According to this line of reasoning the original Epistles of Paul were written in the second century by Marcion and his associates and attributed to Paul at that time; this is a theory promoted by Hermann Detering in *The Falsified Paul*¹⁰.

¹⁰ Available online: www.hermann-detering.de/FabricatedJHC.pdf

Can similar corruption and forgery be found elsewhere in the New Testament?

I believe so; I especially consider *Matthew* and *Acts* to be untrustworthy. This is an issue that address in the article *The Root of the Corruption*.

Was the Marcionite Bible Perfect, or is that too corrupt?

In my opinion it would be naive to assume that the Marcionite version were perfect, or to accept it entirely without careful examination of every single passage. The Marcionite version is much more coherent and self consistent with far fewer signs of alterations and interpolations; however, even the Marcionite text contains a small number of passages which are likely to be interpolations. Including some of the misogynistic passages that I mentioned in Section 5.

Could an inserted passage contain valuable teaching in spite of being fraudulent?

It is important to realise that the concept of forgery was viewed very differently in ancient culture than in modern culture. Sometimes forgery could be an act of deception, but in ancient times that was not always the case. Back then it was common for a writer to attribute that ideas and writings to a revered figure of the past; this was considered an act of humility (this is often known as pseudopigraphy). We have also seen that in many of the passages a scribe was acting from a place of confusion and attempting to clarify the text.

I believe that since these practices were acceptable in the culture of the time, it is possible that God could have constructively used such a scribe in his plans. For this reason perhaps some inserted passages and forged epistles may have some spiritual value in spite of being fraudulent¹¹; though, I think we should be mindful of their fraudulent status when interpreting them.

There are also numerous fraudulent passages which have caused a great deal of harm to many people over the centuries. I can't think of anything positive to say about *Romans* 1:19-2:1, but when it comes to evaluating passages from a spiritual perspective I am hardly an authority. Hope that all readers will carefully consider the passages in question so that their views can be based on spiritual as well as intellectual insights.

¹¹ I'm particularly thinking of *Ephesians* and *2 Thessalonians* here; I consider both of those epistles to be fraudulent in their entirety, but I hold them in high regard none-the-less.

To what extent does corruption in the bible undermine Christian beliefs?

Such large scale corruption in the text of the bible means that some of the most fundamental theological questions must be re-opened and reconsidered. However, I do not believe that the appropriate response is to automatically reject all traditional beliefs and adopt ancient Marcionite beliefs instead. Rather I believe we should carefully consider different aspects of the beliefs of numerous ancient Christian groups. We should be aware that all documented groups may have made mistakes, and several may have carried forward some elements of the truth.

When I first started out on my quest to identify the corruption in the bible I was very afraid that my discoveries would undermine the faith that I held dear. I have certainly discovered many things that have radically changed my perspective, but over all the effect has been positive on my faith. The parts of Christianity that mattered most in my heart are the parts that withstand critical scrutiny.

The word of God retains much of its power even when it is diluted and distorted, and so though even in its corrupt state it remains a power source of strength and healing for many people. I think that the most spiritually aware people have a natural, instinctive tendency to focus on the parts of the bible that are the most sound. Whilst the corrupt passages may call into question many doctrines and dogmas, I think on the deepest level that impact might be less than one would expect.

7 Conclusions

As Christians, the discovery of fraudulent passages and epistles in the bible leaves us with a difficult choice. One option is denial; an avenue which evangelicals, and advocates of “bible inerrancy” have been perusing for some time already. The other option is to investigate the matter with an open mind; this takes considerable courage and faith, and is certainly a less comfortable option in the short term. However I believe that it is possible to identify all of the corrupt additions to the Christian scriptures, and to rediscover the original and purist form of Christianity.

Thank you for taking the time to read this article. If you have any questions or comments or if there is any way I can assist you in your own quest for the truth, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Melissa@Marcionite-Scripture.info

Written: summer 2009

Last updated: 17/January/2011