



**Issues, Etc.**<sup>TM</sup>

*Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio*

## TRANSCRIPT

*Rev. Todd Wilken, Host*

+ + + + +

# "Responding to Bart Ehrman's New Testament Forgery Theory"

**Guest:**

**Dr. John Warwick Montgomery**

**Distinguished Research Professor of Philosophy and Christian Thought  
Patrick Henry College**

**17 May 2011**

+ + + + +

**AUDIO CLIP OF EHRMAN:** A number of the books could not have been written by the authors who are claimed as their authors, because many of these people claimed as their authors were illiterate. Peter, James, Jude could almost certainly read and write. So they couldn't write these books. Other books are forged, we know, because they differ so radically from books by the same author who, in fact, we know they're authentic. And so it's the differences from the authentic books and the fact that

so many of these people were actually illiterate that makes us suspect, in fact, many of these books were forged.

**WILKEN:** That's Dr. Bart Ehrman, recently here on *Issues, Etc.*, explaining his theory that most, almost all, of the New Testament is in some sense or another a forgery. Whether it is Ephesians or Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, the epistles of Peter, the book of Revelation, the four Gospels—they all, according to Dr. Ehrman, fit into the

category of forgeries. Either they're not by the people we think they are, or they're not by the people they claim they are. Now we did that interview with Dr. Ehrman recently and got your reaction a little bit yesterday. We're going to get Dr. John Warwick Montgomery's reaction during this hour of *Issues, Etc.* for the entire hour. And that does not exclude your reactions as well.

Greetings and welcome to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for tuning us in. It is Tuesday afternoon, May 17. Dr. John Warwick Montgomery is a regular guest, Professor Emeritus at the University of Bedfordshire in England, a French Advocate, a Barrister at Law in England and Wales, a member of the Bar of the Supreme Court of the United States. He's Distinguished Research Professor of Philosophy and Christian Thought at Patrick Henry College. And he's author and editor of more than fifty books, including *History, Law, and Christianity* and his *Tractatus Logico Theologicus*. Dr. Montgomery, welcome back to *Issues, Etc.*

**MONTGOMERY:** Thank you.

**WILKEN:** Is it refreshing, at the very least refreshing for you, to hear a skeptical, a liberal Bible scholar simply come out and admit that he believes that much of the New Testament are forgeries in so many words?

**MONTGOMERY:** Yes. It's quite remarkable, actually, because for at least three generations liberal scholars have tried to convince the church public that really they are good believers simply with more exciting, scholarly ideas than have been present in the history of the Church for 2,000 years, and that really there isn't anything the matter with moving in their direction. I think that this is good. It's as refreshing as the Jesus Seminar, where these people have made such appalling statements about Jesus and about the New Testament, that it ought to wake up the churchmen, the laymen, to see that this is

entirely incompatible with historic Christianity. Either these people are right or historic Christianity is correct. They can't possibly both be correct.

**WILKEN:** Before we get to some of what Dr. Ehrman had to say recently on the program, we recently had your colleague, Craig Parton, on the program. And he said that this method, the historical-critical method, to which Dr. Ehrman and so many other of the skeptical scholars subscribe, has been tried in many different fields of literature and rejected in all except Biblical scholarship, where somehow it still hangs on. Is that true?

**MONTGOMERY:** Oh, yes, this certainly is true. In Ugaritic scholarship, for example, the use of divine names, the difference between the use of one divine name and the use of another, in order to establish authorship was rejected after attempts were made to determine the true authors of Ugaritic materials. Cyrus Gordon, the greatest authority in that field, said before he died that if they didn't stop doing this, it would destroy all Ugaritic literature. And when I was at Cornell as an undergraduate, I had a Classics professor by the name of Harry Kaplan, who was quite a wag, and Kaplan said for seventy-five years we tried to find by literary criticism and stylistic differences and interpolations and this kind of thing the true authors of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. And after seventy-five years of this we came to the conclusion that either *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were written by Homer or they were written by someone of the same name who live about the same time. In other words, an attempt to use this sort of technique got absolutely nowhere. And in the history of the English ballad, for example, attempts were made along this line, and even though in some cases the oral tradition is six and seven centuries in length, it's been concluded that these methods will not work. C. S. Lewis said that critics of his work had tried to discover

through similar analysis the real origins of the Narnian material. He said even though they are writing in my own time and in my own language, they've never been right once. Now how is it possible, then, to pull this kind of thing off when one's dealing with Biblical materials that are well over 2,000 years old and written in languages that are not the language of the critic?

**WILKEN:** We spoke recently with Dr. Bart Ehrman. He's Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina and author most recently of the book, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God – Why the Bible's Authors are not Who We Think They Are*. The first thought that he gave us, that I'd like you to react to, Dr. Montgomery, is what he wants us to know about the New Testament:

**AUDIO CLIP OF EHRMAN:** I want them to realize that the Bible, even if they think it is a divine book, the Bible is also a very human book, and that it had human authors who were situated in time and space, and like all other human books, it has problems. There are lots of other books from the ancient world that were forgeries as well. That helps us, I think, understand the Bible should not be an object of worship. The Bible is very much situated in its own history, in its own time and place. And some of these books not only contain things that aren't true, some of the books actually contain lies. The authors were lying about who their identity was. I don't think that means we have to scrap the New Testament, but it does mean that we have to understand its full humanity.

**WILKEN:** Your response, Dr. Montgomery?

**MONTGOMERY:** Well, Aristotle, when he faced criticisms of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, insisted that the benefit of the doubt should always be given to the author. It shouldn't be arrogated by the critic to himself or herself. And in the case of Ehrman and other higher critics of the New

Testament, they pay absolutely no attention to that fundamental principle of literary interpretation, that the author deserves the benefit of the doubt. And therefore the kinds of arguments that are presented by Ehrman and company are gratuitous arguments. It is perfectly possible to handle the material without questioning the authorship or the veracity of the material. And, you know, as a lawyer, I'm particularly irritated by the loose use of terms such as "forgery" and "fraud." These terms have a very precise legal connotation, and they refer to, in general, criminal activity. And to use this sort of language simply means that Ehrman doesn't understand the literary context of what he himself is doing. And that would cause one to suspect that he is probably in the worst possible position to evaluate the work of other people.

**WILKEN:** Isn't there a bit of a straw man here, too, in his opening salvo in that he contrasts his conclusions and theories about forgery with "making the Bible an object of worship," or having some sort of a naiveté when reading the texts of the Bible? Isn't this a bit of a straw man?

**MONTGOMERY:** Well, that's the old saw that's been used by religious liberals since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The idea is to suggest that if you hold that this material is trustworthy, then you've turned it into a paper pope, you're going to do worship—you know, you're going to put a Bible up on a stand and worship the Bible—and that sort of thing. Sure it's a straw man. But, you know, this sells books. And there's no doubt about the fact that if you want to sell religious books, what you do is to present utterly off-the-wall, bizarre interpretations that go against 2,000 years of Christian history.

You know, when Ehrman says, for example, that the teaching within the Pauline corpus in the New Testament can't possibly be reconciled, that resurrection is understood

in some of this material as only the end of time, whereas it is understood as having already taken place by other material in this same volume...

**WILKEN:** About twenty seconds here.

**MONTGOMERY:** ...this is just utter nonsense. There's been 2,000 years of commentaries on the New Testament which have had no trouble at all in reconciling these approaches. To the idea of discarding part of the material because it's inconsistent is simply ridiculous.

**WILKEN:** Dr. John Warwick Montgomery is our guest. We're responding to cuts from our previous interview with Dr. Bart Ehrman, author of the book, *Forged*, answering the question: "Is much of the New Testament, in fact, forgery?"

**[BREAK]**

**AUDIO CLIP OF EHRMAN:** I think what happens when you include the forgeries, is that you begin to realize that there are lots of different views found among the early Christians. So the views in Ephesians, as I was saying, they're different from the views that you find in Paul's letter to the Romans. And if you try to reconcile the two, you come up with an amalgamation that isn't like either Romans or Ephesians. And so I think that the best way to read the New Testament is to let each author have his own say and not pretend that he's saying the same thing some other author is saying.

**WILKEN:** Dr. Bart Ehrman, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina and author of the new book, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God – Why the Bible's Authors are not Who We Think They Are*, recently on the program. Dr. John Warwick Montgomery is our guest. We're getting his response to some of the arguments made by Dr. Ehrman. He's author and editor of more than fifty books, including *History, Law, and Christianity* and

his *Tractatus Logico Theologicus*. You can find out more about Dr. Montgomery's books. There are man of them, and you do want to make them part of your library. Go to the "Listen on Demand" page at [www.issuesetc.org](http://www.issuesetc.org).

Dr. Montgomery, the next thing I wanted you to respond to has to do with how many – I just want a ballpark and really kind of get the scope of Dr. Ehrman's theories here – how much of the New Testament is left when the forgeries are laid aside?

**AUDIO CLIP OF EHRMAN:** There are twenty-seven books in the New Testament and critical scholars today typically say that only eight of these books are probably written by the people whose names are attached to them. So, for example, there are thirteen letters that claim to be written by Paul, and scholars are pretty sure that Paul actually wrote seven of the thirteen, but that the six are not written by Paul. They're what scholars might call "pseudepigrapha," or what I would call forgeries. In addition to the seven Pauline letters, the book of Revelation was probably written by somebody who really was named "John." The other books are either anonymous and assigned to people who aren't claimed as the authors. For example, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John don't claim to be written by people named Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They probably weren't written by people named Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but it's not the author's fault that later people said they were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. So you get those kinds of anonymous books, and then you get books where an author claims to be somebody who he's not, and that's what I'm calling a forgery. And there are probably eleven or twelve of those in the New Testament.

**WILKEN:** There's a lot there to respond to, Dr. Montgomery. Where do you begin?

**MONTGOMERY:** Well, actually, I'd like to make a further point concerning what we were talking about just before the break. The argument that Ehrman presents that you get these diverse theologies within the Pauline material. He claims that, for example, in a couple of the books you get a resurrection immediately and others you get it only at the end of time, this kind of thing. You know, for years and years, for generations, those problems have easily been resolved. For example, the concept of realized eschatology versus the concept of futuristic eschatology. There's no difficulty at all in experiencing the resurrection now and looking forward to it at the end of time. What Ehrman is doing is making invidious comparisons that are not necessary at all. And I hope that later on in the program we can get into the problems connected with analyzing style and vocabulary as a means of establishing authorship, because that's one of his most fundamental mistakes. You just cannot do this.

Now, as to the books of the New Testament, whether they were written by the traditional authors or not. What Ehrman doesn't tell you is that we have excellent first-hand authorities within the early Church to establish the authorship of key New Testament materials. For example, in Polycarp and Papias, we have accounts given to them by the Apostle John concerning the writing of the New Testament, and they were told that Matthew's gospel was written by Matthew the tax collector, who was an apostle, that Mark's gospel was written by John Mark, who was a companion of Peter, that Luke's gospel was written by the physician who accompanied the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys, and, of course, that John's gospel was indeed apostolic. Now that kind of back up doesn't exist for the gnostic gospels and the kind of stuff that is called pseudepigrapha. And when Ehrman suggests that there isn't any difference at all between the problems we have with non-

biblical New Testament literature and the stuff that was included in the canon, he's just deceiving you. He's giving an impression that is not a full story in the slightest.

**WILKEN:** To the issue that you wanted to address before, and that is when he wants to take apart the Pauline canon, that is, those thirteen books attributed to Paul, he wants to pit the ones he trusts, namely, Romans and Galatians, against the ones he calls forgeries, Ephesians and Colossians.

**AUDIO CLIP OF EHRMAN:** Well, the thing with Ephesians is that the author is quite emphatic that believers have not only died already with Christ; believers have been raised with Christ and are seated with Christ already in the heavenly places. So that you've both died and been raised with Christ in the past. And this is precisely the point of view that Paul has to argue against in some of his authentic letters. Paul certainly thinks in the book of Romans, for example, that a person when he or she is baptized has died with Christ. But he's equally emphatic that there has not yet been a resurrection with Christ. The resurrection with Christ is going to come only at the end when Jesus returns from heaven and people will be raised from the dead. He has to correct people who think that there's already been a resurrection, because there are people in his churches who claim that they already of the full benefits of salvation, and Paul wants argue vehemently that, no, you don't have the full benefits of salvation; the resurrection hasn't happened yet. But for the book of Ephesians, the resurrection has happened already. And so it takes a Pauline idea, but it takes it in precisely the opposite way that Paul takes it.

**WILKEN:** You mentioned before the break, Dr. Montgomery, that what Ehrman fails to notice here is that Paul can talk about the

resurrection in two distinct and yet related senses.

**MONTGOMERY:** Well, yes, sure. That's what we were just saying. The fact of the matter is that people can experience the resurrection now, and yet look forward to it at the end of time. This is what theologically is called "realized eschatology" in the present and "futuristic eschatology," what's going to come up later. And there's no problem in reconciling this kind of thing at all.

Interestingly enough, there was a book done just a couple of years ago by another radical critic of the New Testament, a fellow who teaches at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. His name is William Walker. And this book is entitled *Interpolations in the Pauline Letters*. And what he tries to do is to determine what passages in the Pauline letters can be regarded as interpolations. Now, in spite of the fact that he is with great agony and over some 250 pages manages to squeeze out a few interpolations, he points out how dangerous the whole process is. For example, he says this, on page 83: "As in the case of linguistic evidence extreme caution is required in the use of ideational evidence for interpolation" – that is, different ideas. "First, the same author may, and Paul certainly sometimes does, express different ideas, depending on the intended audience, subject matter, situation, purpose, or even which section of the letter is under consideration. Moreover, an author's ideas, like his or her vocabulary or literary style, may change with the passing of time. And significant conceptual differences may simply be an indication that the author is incorporating alien material into his or her work." In other words, this is an unreliable way of determining authorship.

And I have another glorious quotation – you're going to love this, and this is not the sort of thing theologians normally read. This is from *A Historian's Guide to Computing*,

published by Oxford University Press in 1994. The author is Daniel Greenstein, and he says this: "A collection of newspaper articles and an autobiographical account all by the same author may differ considerably in their measurable style. Clearly, stylistic analyses are fallible and cannot provide positive identification of a text's authorship or literary heritage." It seems to me that we were told that it would be like trying to put together – what? – a couple of authors like Mark Twain and T.S. Eliot to think that the New Testament material attributed to Paul was actually written by him. Well, listen, for the fun of it sometime, take a look at Goethe's *Faust*, part 1, and compare it with Goethe's *Faust*, part 2, the second version, which was done years later. The vocabulary is radically different. The thrust, the ideological thrust, is very, very different. If you took those two works and didn't know that Goethe had written both of them, you never in the world would conclude that they were written by the same person.

And I have, finally, an illustration that you're going to love. A few years ago in England two liberal scholars along Ehrman's line, a gentleman by the name of McGregor and another by the name of Morton, produced a book in which they took Romans and Corinthians and Galatians as the basis, stylistic basis, and they fed the style into a computer, and then they compared the other letters that are attributed to Paul in the New Testament. They compared the styles of those letters against the basic style that they had put in. And they concluded that not a single one of those other letters was written by Paul. Okay? Then, a few years later, at Harvard, their book – McGregor and Morton's book – was analyzed. The style of the introduction and preface of the book were fed in as a basis. And then the style of the succeeding chapters were fed in, and the conclusion was that McGregor and Morton had not written the rest of the book. The rest of the book must have been written by other people. Now, of course, this was

done as a wag, but it shows that you can't use vocabulary and style as any kind of solid basis for determining authorship. What you need are external evidences that will provide you with guidance. And that's exactly what the early Church relied upon, and that's why we have the New Testament as we have it today.

**WILKEN:** We're responding to our interview with Dr. Bart Ehrman on the topic: Is much of the New Testament forged? Dr. John Warwick Montgomery is our guest on this Tuesday afternoon, May 17.

**[BREAK]**

**AUDIO CLIP OF EHRMAN:** The things I say about the New Testament containing forgeries are things that scholars have been saying for over a hundred years. This is not something that's new. This is simply what scholars have been saying, that most people haven't heard about.

**WILKEN:** That's Dr. Bart Ehrman, author of the new book, *Forged*. We're getting a response to our interview with him. Dr. John Warwick Montgomery is our guest. Dr. Montgomery, you are the International Director of the International Academy of Apologetics, Evangelism, and Human Rights. How could someone attending this annual academy in Strasbourg, France – how would it help equip them, if you will, to respond to the likes of Ehrman and his ilk?

**MONTGOMERY:** Well, we deal with exactly this sort of thing. We take the most important objections to Christian faith, and particularly objections to the reliability of the Scriptures, reliability to the portrait of Jesus set forth in the New Testament, and by the time the two-week program is ended the people who have participated in this are able to handle 99.44% of the objections and difficulties that people encounter in personal witness. Really this is an advanced training in evangelism. One of the sad things in some church circles is that people rely on

their confidence as believers so that when they encounter unbelievers, they don't feel that it's necessary to prepare to answer their objections. All they do is talk about their personal faith. And, of course, their personal faith is of vital importance, but we need to understand that the non-Christian hasn't already experienced the faith, and the non-Christian in secular society inevitably is going to have real problems with the case for Christianity. So an institute of advanced studies in apologetics is marvelous. And this can be achieved in a two-week period. This is done once a year in Strasbourg, France, in the French Rhineland. It is not expensive. It's about the price of a Hawaiian holiday, where you wouldn't learn anything and probably get a dreadful sunburn. So we strongly recommend that listeners to *Issues, Etc.* consider this. We are full for this summer, but the brochure and the information for July 2012 is already available, and we trust that listeners will take advantage of this. Early registration is very important, because we take only twenty people each year.

**WILKEN:** We will post a link to the International Academy for Apologetics, Evangelism, and Human Rights, held each summer in Strasbourg, France, at our website, [www.issuesetc.org](http://www.issuesetc.org).

This comes from Thomas in Eden, Oklahoma. He says, "In Dr. Montgomery's opinion, are scholars such as Dr. Ehrman prone to overplay in the area of speculation? That is, do we often see the plain facts left behind or downplayed in favor of imaginative and yet ultimately baseless theories. Just from my personal observation," writes Thomas, "it certainly seems that while the critics demand that Christians defend their claims and positions from hard evidence and the historical record, critics themselves are usually given a pass and allowed to speculate wildly without facing the same scrutiny. Can we call this a double standard?"

**MONTGOMERY:** I'd agree with that 1000%. The fact of the matter is that if you're taking the kind of position that Ehrman represents, you have only speculation to rely upon. But the trouble is that the average person who is not a specialist in the area doesn't realize this. The person listens to someone like Ehrman because he's erudite and he has a professorship at a university and, therefore, they assume that underlying the view that he presents there is solid evidence. He said on your program, I believe, the scholarly edition of this book was now being prepared in three volumes or something of this kind. Listen, it doesn't make any difference how many volumes you use to present this stuff. It is based upon utter speculation. And the primary example of this is what we were talking about before, that stylistic differences and vocabulary differences are used to establish authorship. And this is simply bad scholarship. These are not a sufficient ground for determining authorship. That's the fundamental error in the whole business. And I hope before the program ends I will have a chance to rant and rave about the concept of fraud, because I happen to be a licensed international certified fraud examiner. And fraud happens to be a technical field, and I know something about fraud. And when Ehrman presents the New Testament materials as forgeries and the product of fraudulent activity, this deserves a word.

**WILKEN:** James in Montana says, "I" – speaking for himself – "I regularly change style, vocabulary, or even purpose on my way from one of my dual parishes to the other." Your thoughts there?

**MONTGOMERY:** Well, of course, he does. Consider: if you looked at your love letters and you looked at your term papers, I hope that you would find a radical difference between them. You've written both, but if the style is the same, either you never got married or you never managed to pass an academic course. I mean the fact of the

matter is, there are innumerable different reasons for writing in different audiences, and we choose our style and vocabulary accordingly. This is why, for example, there's a tremendous difference between the Gospel of John and the Revelation of St. John, the Apocalypse. Why? Well, John says at the end of his gospel that if all the things Jesus said and did were recorded, the world couldn't contain the material, and he therefore has carefully chosen the material to show that Jesus is the Christ and by believing in Him you'll have life in His name. Where as in the of the Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, John is on the island of Patmos, and he gets zapped by the Holy Spirit on the Lord's Day. Bam! Thump! And he starts writing. And therefore the whole approach is different. And you don't have carefully worked out Greek sentences; you have some sentences that end in mid-air. But this has to do with the context, the *gestalt*. And this is the kind of thing that poor Ehrman is apparently incapable of comprehending or he doesn't want to comprehend it, because if he went with the historic Church during the last 2,000 years, he probably wouldn't be able to sell the same number of books.

**WILKEN:** Steven in Knoxville, Tennessee, says, "If Paul didn't write his epistles, how did he get to be so well known throughout the eastern Mediterranean Christian communities that people would want to forge letters bearing his imprint? And if he never wrote letters and he was this well known, why would people accept these letters and not determine them to be forgeries? How does the argument for Pauline letters to be forgeries square with the well-known record of church correspondence between bishops and different parts of the Roman Empire that date back to the late first century and the second? Are these too forgeries?" he asks.

**MONTGOMERY:** Yeah, that's all good stuff. The fact of the matter is that the so-called

forgeries, in Ehrman's terms, are virtually as early as the stuff that he accepts. And if that's the case, then there wasn't time for Paul's reputation to be established on a sufficient basis for all this other stuff to be attributed to him. I mean, you know, the whole thing just doesn't wash.

**WILKEN:** Here is Dr. Ehrman, again from our interview recently with him on his forgery theory for much of the New Testament. He said this was his strongest case, and that against one of the epistles of Peter. Here's his case against Peter writing Peter.

**AUDIO CLIP OF EHRMAN:** It's striking that 2 Peter goes out of its way to claim that it was written by Peter. And so the author talks, for example, about being present when Jesus experiences transfiguration on the Mount of Transfiguration. And so he really wants his readers to think that he's Peter. But there are lots and lots of reasons for assuming that, in fact, he was not. In a place like rural Galilee, where there weren't schools, there wasn't the possibility of education, people like Peter who came from a town named Capernaum, just a small little town, simply wouldn't have gone to school to learn to read and write. And, you know, it's not that weird of a claim, or bizarre a claim, to say that Peter was illiterate, because the New Testament itself says that Peter was illiterate. In Acts 4:13 both Peter and John are said to be "*agrammatoi*," which is the Greek word for illiterate, somebody who doesn't know their letters."

**WILKEN:** Dr. Montgomery, about a minute to begin your response to that, and we have to take a break after a minute.

**MONTGOMERY:** [Laughs] Okay, okay. The fact of the matter is that it may well be that Peter was weak in the Greek language, but that doesn't mean that he wasn't able to handle Aramaic, for example. And – heavens! – what is the evidence that he was illiterate, as a matter of fact? We don't have

any evidence to that effect. That one particular passage doesn't provide any thoroughgoing proof of it. And even if he were, he could have used amanuenses. But listen, listen. I've met a fair number of fishermen, and they may not have been T.S. Eliot [laughs], but they certainly were able to read and write. And I think it is scurrilous to suggest – not to suggest, but to declare, absolutely – that Peter is an illiterate.

**WILKEN:** When we come back, we'll get a little bit more on the illiterate Peter theory, with Dr. John Warwick Montgomery responding to Dr. Bart Ehrman on the topic of whether or not much of the New Testament is forged. I'm Todd Wilken. Ten more minutes on the other side of the break with Dr. Montgomery on this Tuesday afternoon, May 17.

**[BREAK]**

**AUDIO CLIP OF EHRMAN:** For some years now I've been devoting myself exclusively to trying to understand the forgeries of early Christianity, not just the New Testament but all the forgeries that we know about from the first 400 years of the Church.

**WILKEN:** Again, Dr. Bart Ehrman. It's kind of been his quest, as a scholar, to figure out how much of the New Testament is actually forged and to expose it. He thinks he's done so in his latest book called *Forged*. Dr. John Warwick Montgomery is our guest, responding to excerpts from our interview with Dr. Ehrman recently here on the program.

Dr. Montgomery, you mentioned before that you are an internationally licensed fraud investigator, and that the argument he makes throughout his book, and especially with regard to Peter there, that someone is actively portraying himself as St. Peter when he is not St. Peter. That would be fraud by mail, I think, in current law. He

sends it out saying, “Hey, I’m Peter,” when he is not Peter. What are your thoughts there, as a fraud investigator, of those claims?

**MONTGOMERY:** [Laughs] Well, a lot has been done to analyze the basis for committing fraud. Fraud doesn’t occur out of the blue. There are certain characteristics that are invariably connected with it. For example, the great Donald Kressey, who was one of the most important authorities in this field, developed what he called the “fraud triangle,” and this has been expanded upon by others. Putting this very simply, you don’t get fraud unless you have at least three things going on at the same time. There has to be an opportunity and it has to be perceived, a perceived opportunity to deceive. Then there’s got to be pressure, either social pressure or internal pressure, to do this. Nobody does this kind of thing without having some motivation for doing it. And those two characteristics need to be very positive. There needs to be considerable pressure, and there needs to be a very good opportunity. And the third element is that there has to be a very low level of personal integrity. If the personal integrity is very high, it’ll overcome those other two characteristics.

Now, let’s look at the New Testament context. Were the New Testament Christians, the people in these churches, people of very low personal integrity, people who had tremendous social pressures or internal pressures on them to deceive by writing books and attributing them to other people, and did they have a glorious opportunity? I mean, would their books be sent out, would their letters be sent out all over the place? If you look at the situation in the New Testament context, you discover that the motivational factors that are necessary to carry out fraud are simply not there. These were people who had been saved through the love of Christ, and they were people who were committed Jesus’

teachings, and Jesus is against lying. He says that some of the people of his time were liars from the beginning, they were of the devil, liars from the beginning—some of the religious leaders of the time. So it’s just inconceivable that this kind of interpretation ought to be put upon them. I mean it is even scurrilous to do so.

And incidentally, also, the fact is that through Western history we have known perfectly well the difference between genuine writings and fraudulent writings. For example, at the time of the Reformation—really, the time of the Renaissance just before the Reformation—it was discovered by a scholar, Lorenzo Valla in Italy, that the so-called “Donation of Constantine” was a forged document. This was a document that supposedly gave the papacy temporal authority above that of the emperor, gave the Church temporal authority to rule everything. And when this was revealed as a forgery, the result was that papal authority lost a great deal of the impact that it had had. And people were perfectly well aware of the difference between a genuine article and something that had been fraudulently produced. And you see in a case like that you’ve got exactly the characteristics—you’ve got low personal integrity, you’ve got a real opportunity, and you’ve got lots of pressure internally to increase the powers of the Church. You don’t have any of that going in the New Testament. And for that reason, the Ehrman thesis is simply false.

**WILKEN:** Dr. Montgomery, I’d like your brief reaction to one last excerpt from our interview with Dr. Bart Ehrman. Here he talks about the overall message of the New Testament, or, in this case, the lack thereof.

**AUDIO CLIP OF EHRMAN:** I don’t think there’s only one message in the New Testament. I think the New Testament has lots of different messages about a lot of different things, and that even on very basic issues, such as who was Jesus and how

does one attain salvation I think different authors actually have different views on these fundamental questions.

**WILKEN:** About a minute to respond to that last excerpt, Dr. Montgomery.

**MONTGOMERY:** Well, if that were true, then the Christian Church ought to close its doors, because if there isn't any single message, if this is simply a concatenation of different viewpoints among Jews of the first century, who cares? Who cares? I mean why not different opinions among Indians of the fifth century? And, listen, the New Testament itself says that it has a single consistent teaching. It says that the early Church was united in the apostles' doctrine, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. And there is no question about the fact that the New Testament presents itself as offering a single way of salvation. Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Me." And at the beginning of the book of Acts it is preached that there is none other name under heaven by which we must be saved than the name of Jesus. And in 1 Corinthians 15, which even Ehrman would agree was written by Paul, Paul gives the Gospel and he says by which you are being saved if you keep it in your remembrance that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. This is not a *potpourri* of religious ideas, for heaven's sake. It is the clean, clear revelation of God Almighty, offering salvation if we will simply shut up and listen to Him. I am sick and tired of people who want to reconstruct Christianity in their own image or in the image of other people. I want people to be quiet, open up the Bible, and listen to what it's actually saying. And if they do this, they'll find it's a single message, a single Savior, and a single opportunity to go to heaven.

**WILKEN:** Dr. Montgomery, about two minutes to respond. If you were debating Dr. Bart Ehrman on the issue of "Is much of the New Testament forged?" if you would, give us, in two minutes, your closing argument.

**MONTGOMERY:** Well, my argument would simply provide Ehrman with numerous illustrations of how you can't establish authorship by vocabulary differences or by stylistic changes. I would beat him over the head with such examples. And then I would say: Why is it that when it comes to the New Testament, you will not give what Aristotle required: the benefit of the doubt to those writers? What makes you think that you have the right to arrogate questions of authorship to yourself 2,000 years later, when the history of the Church for 2,000 years has held that these writings were indeed written by the people that they are traditionally attributed to, and that they present a single message? You are standing at loggerheads with the entire history of the Christian Church, East and West.

**WILKEN:** Dr. John Warwick Montgomery is Professor Emeritus of the University of Bedfordshire in England, a French Advocate, a Barrister at Law in England and Wales, a member of the Bar of the Supreme Court for the United States. He's Distinguished Research Professor of Philosophy and Christian Thought at Patrick Henry College and author and editor of more than fifty books, including *History, Law, and Christianity* and his *Tractatus Logico Theologicus*. Dr. Montgomery, thank you for your time this afternoon.

**MONTGOMERY:** You're always welcome.

**WILKEN:** I think about what I've written, and I've written a fair amount, in the last twenty-five years of my professional career. There's stuff that I wrote at my very beginning of my pastoral ministry—sermons, letters, articles—that actually, to

tell you the truth, I mean in the human sense—we're not talking about any divine inspiration at work here—in a human sense I probably wouldn't write again. If I went back and looked at some of those, I wouldn't necessarily even be able to tell if I wrote it, and my memory's pretty good about what I wrote. Here's an illustration. Just this Sunday my colleague in the ministry stood in the pulpit, and he began his sermon by quoting me from a sermon that I had preached about five years ago.

He had the text of it. And I sat and listened. He didn't say it was from me. I sat and listened and thought, "Well, that's some pretty interesting ideas." And when he was done quoting, he looked over at me across the chancel, and he said he doesn't even know I'm quoting him. And I didn't, because I didn't recognize even my own style. It doesn't prove authorship. I had written it. I just didn't even remember it myself. I'm Todd Wilken. Talk with you again tomorrow. Thanks for listening to *Issues, Etc.*

+ + + + +