QUESTION: Something I would love to see you talk about is how the letters we think were written by Paul differ from the letters we think were not written by him.

RESPONSE: Yes, this is an all-important question, and one I’ve been interested in for a very long time. As many readers of the blog know, I’ve recently published two books on the broad question of “forgeries” in early Christianity, one of them written for scholars at a fairly dense, academic level, and the other for a lay audience (“normal” people, as opposed to abnormal scholars). In these books I use the term “forgery” in a very specific, technical sense, to refer to books that make a false authorial claim – that is, a “forgery” is a book whose author claims to be someone other than who he is, almost always someone famous. For the early Christians, these would invariably be the “authorities” who knew Jesus during his lifetime or soon after (so, Peter, Mary, James, Paul, Thomas, Philip, etc – we even have a couple of works allegedly written by Jesus himself.)

Among the issues I deal with in my two books are why someone would forge a document in an apostle’s (or someone else’s) name, how they tried to conceal their real identity, what kinds of ploys they used, how these forgeries were meant to “function” (i.e. what they were trying to accomplish), and so on. And one of the very key issues is “How Do You Know?” That is, how have scholars in the modern period detected these forgeries? What is the evidence?

So...

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