

Sept. 29, 2026

AZ: *summarize bart ehrman's views of nina livesey's 2024 book on the letters of paul, as found in Ehrman's remarks on his blog*

ChatGPT said:

Yes. I found the relevant discussion on the **Bart Ehrman Blog**, including Ehrman's own responses to readers discussing Nina E. Livesey's 2024 book, *The Letters of Paul in Their Roman Literary Context: Reassessing Apostolic Authorship*. Cambridge University Press lists the book as a 2024 publication.

Ehrman's basic position

Ehrman **does not accept Livesey's central thesis** that the seven letters normally regarded as authentic Pauline letters are actually a second-century pseudonymous literary collection. His remarks indicate that he regards her proposal as interesting and worth engaging, but he continues to hold the conventional critical position that **seven letters genuinely derive from Paul**.

This is especially clear when the Blog's discussion contrasts Livesey's proposal with Ehrman's position. Ehrman's own posts continue to describe Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon as the letters that "by virtual consensus" are considered authentically Pauline.

What Livesey is arguing

As Ehrman's Blog discussion summarizes it, Livesey's argument is considerably more radical than the usual claim that some Pauline letters are forged:

- The **seven supposedly authentic letters are themselves pseudonymous**.
- They were composed as a **literary collection**, rather than being Paul's surviving correspondence with actual first-century congregations.
- Their setting is **second-century Roman Christianity**, rather than Paul's first-century missionary career.
- The letters make use of the ancient practice of **fictive/pseudonymous letters**, in which an author's ideas are presented through the voice of an authoritative figure.
- Livesey places the emergence of the Pauline collection in connection with the **Marcionite milieu**, rather than treating Marcion as merely someone who inherited an already-existing collection of Paul's authentic letters.
- Consequently, the traditional chronology—Paul's letters → Gospels/Acts → Marcion—is substantially reversed or disrupted.

The book's title itself captures the fundamental move: rather than beginning with the assumption that the letters are apostolic documents and then reconstructing Paul's life from them, Livesey asks whether

they should instead be understood as literary products whose supposed authorship needs to be demonstrated.

Where Ehrman pushes back

The most important point in Ehrman's remarks is that **he thinks there is evidence for Pauline letters before Marcion**. In particular, the Blog discussion brings up **Ignatius**, whose writings Ehrman considers evidence that at least some Pauline material—especially Romans—was known before Marcion. That creates a serious chronological problem for a theory in which Marcion's circle created the Pauline corpus in the mid-second century.

So Ehrman's objection isn't simply, "Most scholars disagree with Livesey." It is more substantive:

If Pauline letters were already circulating before Marcion, the proposed Marcionite origin of the collection becomes much harder to sustain.

That is the issue the Blog's discussion repeatedly comes back to.

An important distinction

Ehrman **does agree with Livesey on some of the methodological ground**, even though he rejects her overall conclusion.

He has long emphasized that the Pauline letters are not pristine transcripts of Paul's original correspondence. For example, he discusses the possibility that **Philippians is itself a composite of multiple letters**, and he recognizes extensive editorial activity in the transmission of Paul's writings.

He also emphatically accepts that **pseudonymous Pauline writings existed in antiquity**. His 2024 Blog series discusses numerous writings falsely attributed to Paul and notes that the six disputed NT letters are generally regarded by critical scholars as non-Pauline.

Thus, the disagreement is **not**:

Ehrman: "Ancient Christians never wrote things in Paul's name."

versus

Livesey: "They did."

Rather, it is approximately:

Livesey: The phenomenon of pseudonymous Pauline writing should be extended to the seven letters conventionally regarded as authentic, and the whole collection is best explained as a second-century literary creation.

Ehrman: Pseudonymous Pauline writings certainly existed, and the Pauline corpus was edited and transmitted in complicated ways, but the evidence still supports the historical Paul and the authenticity of the seven undisputed letters; moreover, evidence such as Ignatius creates chronological difficulties for a wholly second-century/Marcionite origin.

In one sentence

Ehrman's view is that Livesey has raised a genuinely interesting challenge to the standard reconstruction of the Pauline corpus, but he does not accept her proposed solution: he continues to think that seven letters really go back to the historical Paul and that evidence for Pauline letters predating Marcion undermines Livesey's proposed second-century origin.

One caveat: the Ehrman Blog material is somewhat scattered through **forum exchanges rather than a single formal review by Ehrman**, and some of the statements attributed to "Ehrman" in the forum are actually **readers quoting or paraphrasing him**. I've therefore separated what can be securely attributed to Ehrman from what forum participants say about his position.

If you'd like, I can also give you a **point-by-point comparison of Livesey's argument with Ehrman's objections**, including the evidence concerning **Ignatius, Marcion, Acts, Revelation, and the dating of the seven letters**.

AZ: I just want a summary of all of Ehrman's main arguments

ChatGPT said:

Yes. I went back through the relevant **Ehrman Blog material**, and I should narrow my earlier answer: the Blog does **not** contain a single extended Ehrman review of Livesey's book. His substantive comments are scattered, especially in the forum discussions. The main arguments I can actually attribute to Ehrman are these:

1. **The biggest problem is the dating of Ignatius.**

Ehrman says the letters of Ignatius of Antioch should be dated to about **110 CE**, which he says is overwhelmingly the view of specialists and rests on "a number of pretty good reasons," including internal evidence and the relationship to Polycarp. He specifically rejects the idea that the early dating is simply an attempt to make Ignatius inconveniently early for a theory such as Livesey's.

This matters because **Ignatius appears to know Paul's Letter to the Romans**. If Ignatius really wrote around 110, then Romans—and therefore at least part of the Pauline corpus—existed **well before Marcion's activity in the 130s**. That is a major chronological difficulty for Livesey's proposed second-century explanation.

2. **He doesn't regard the later dating of Ignatius as a serious alternative.**

When commenters brought up scholars such as Richard Pervo and Timothy Barnes, who have argued for a considerably later date, Ehrman responded that he wasn't aware that their arguments had persuaded many Ignatian scholars. He explicitly characterized the c. 110 dating as "by far the most widely held view."

3. **Ehrman therefore sees a real pre-Marcionite Pauline tradition.**

This is important because Livesey's reconstruction requires explaining how the Pauline letters came into existence in a second-century Roman literary environment. Ehrman's evidence from

Ignatius supplies an independent witness that makes that reconstruction difficult: **Pauline letters were already circulating before the period in which Livesey places their creation.**

His later Blog answer puts the point even more plainly: 2 Peter already refers to Paul's letters as Scripture, and Ignatius around 110 refers to Paul's letters.

4. **He distinguishes pseudonymous Pauline literature from the seven letters.**

Ehrman absolutely agrees that Christians **did write letters in Paul's name**. He has written extensively about Pauline forgeries, including letters associated with Marcion and other pseudonymous compositions. But that is not evidence, in his view, that the seven undisputed letters themselves are pseudonymous. In his March 2024 discussion of Marcion, for example, he explicitly distinguishes Marcionite forgeries from the Pauline letters Marcion actually inherited and edited.

In other words, his reasoning is roughly:

"We know people forged letters in Paul's name" ≠ "therefore the seven canonical Pauline letters were forged."

5. **The existence of a Pauline collection doesn't require Marcion to have created it.**

This is an important implication of Ehrman's position. A reader asked him in 2025 how letters sent to different places could ever have been gathered together. Ehrman's answer was that this is certainly a difficult historical question, but it isn't miraculous: he points to the collection of Ignatius's own letters as a comparable phenomenon.

So Ehrman accepts that **the formation of the Pauline collection needs explanation**. He simply doesn't think that the difficulty of explaining its formation establishes Livesey's Marcionite/second-century solution.

6. **He accepts extensive editorial transmission of Paul's letters.**

This is another qualification that is easy to miss. Ehrman does **not** have a naïve picture in which the seven letters came down to us exactly as Paul originally produced them. His 2024 discussions of Philippians emphasize that the letter appears to be a combination of two originally separate letters and that Paul dictated his correspondence to scribes. Consequently, even determining what constitutes the "original" text is complicated.

Thus, Ehrman is perfectly comfortable with **later collection, editing, copying, and alteration** of Pauline material. His objection is specifically to moving the *creation of the supposedly authentic letters themselves* into the second century.

7. **He thinks the evidence for an historical Paul remains substantial.**

Ehrman's general position on Paul is that the seven undisputed letters are genuinely Paul's, while the later disputed letters—Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, the Pastorals, etc.—can be pseudonymous. His discussion of Ephesians, for example, says that comparison with Paul's undisputed letters convinced him that Ephesians wasn't written by Paul.

That distinction is fundamental to his response to Livesey: **Ehrman's critical method does not require accepting apostolic authorship for everything attributed to Paul; rather, he thinks**

the seven-letter core survives historical scrutiny in a way the other Pauline writings do not.

8. He does not think the Acts/Paul discrepancy proves that Paul is fictional.

Ehrman himself recognizes substantial differences between the Paul portrayed in Acts and the Paul who speaks in the undisputed letters. He has written specifically about those contradictions. But he treats this as a problem in reconstructing Paul's historical career and Luke's portrayal of him—not as evidence that the Paul of the letters was invented.

So, reduced to the core argument

Ehrman's case against Livesey, as far as I can find **Ehrman himself making it on the Blog**, is essentially:

Livesey's proposal requires the seven letters to be products of a second-century literary process, but there is evidence that Pauline letters—particularly Romans—were already circulating by the early second century. The strongest piece is Ignatius, whom Ehrman dates to about 110 CE. The evidence for a much later Ignatian date is, in Ehrman's view, not persuasive enough to overturn that. Therefore the chronological foundation of Livesey's reconstruction is problematic.

And Ehrman supplements that chronological argument with a methodological one:

The fact that Paul was later used as a pseudonymous literary persona, that his letters were edited and collected, and that some letters attributed to him are forgeries does not establish that the seven undisputed letters are themselves fictional.

One correction to my previous answer is worth emphasizing: **I don't find Ehrman on the Blog making a broad, point-by-point refutation of Livesey's literary arguments.** His clearly documented direct response is much narrower—above all, **the pre-Marcion evidence for Pauline letters, especially Ignatius's apparent knowledge of Romans and Ehrman's defense of an early date for Ignatius.**

If you want, I can next reconstruct **Ehrman's argument about Ignatius and Romans in detail**—i.e., exactly what Ignatius says that Ehrman thinks presupposes Romans, and how that creates a problem for Livesey's chronology.