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## WITHOUT ERROR

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At the end of the fourth century there was an interesting exchange of letters between Augustine of Hippo and Jerome who was 12 years his senior. Augustine raised a few questions about the rationale behind Jerome's translation of the Bible into Latin but also about a particular point in Jerome's commentary on Galatians where the monk had asserted that Paul had not rebuked Peter, despite what the letter of Galatians appears to say. Henry Chadwick in 'The Early Church' observes that 'Jerome was a prickly figure who 'could not endure criticism.' At first Jerome ignored the letter so that Augustine had to write twice more (the post was also not so fast in those days). Jerome then said he ignored the letter because he thought it a fake - he was sure Augustine would not have written to him in such terms. Finally he rebuked Augustine for being so impudent and accused him of seeking to use the letter (which has apparently found its way into the open) to boost his own reputation. Although at the end of his life Jerome seems to have recognised the great talent of Augustine he deflected the substantive simply stating that he his own commentary merely followed that of Origen. Sadly, I don't believe any copies of Origen's commentary have survived.

Augustine wrote in his first letter; 'it seems to me that most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books' (Letter 28 chapter 3). He repeated the point in his second letter; '...by the admission of falsehood here, the authority of the Holy Scriptures given for faith of all coming generations is to me made wholly uncertain and wavering' (40.5). Later he spelt out His own understanding of the nature of authority, 'I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error'. He accepted the authority of other writers only 'because they have succeeded in convincing my judgement of its truth either by means of these canonical writings themselves, or by argument addressed to my reason.' (82.3)