

The
PRESCRIPTION
Against Heretics

Tertullian

Resurrection Publishing

THE PRESCRIPTION AGAINST HERETICS

Tertullian

Member Edition sample · Resurrection Publishing

This free excerpt includes the Note on the Text and selected chapters. It is not the full book.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

Primary witness

The text of this Member Edition follows a single copy-text: T. Herbert Bindley, trans., *Tertullian: On the Testimony of the Soul and On the “Prescription” of Heretics* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York: E. S. Gorham, **1914**), the treatise *On the “Prescription” of Heretics* only.

Page-image authority for accept is the Internet Archive scan `tertullianontest00tertuoft`. Stage 3 proof for this Theme 2 title used AI image-collation against that authority (zero-defect bar; see edition design 2026-07-24).

Scope

This edition prints Bindley’s English of *De praescriptione haereticorum*, **Chapters I–XLV**, complete. Bindley’s footnotes are retained as chapter-end notes with superscript callouts in the body (house pattern). Opaque Latin short titles in those notes are glossed with a brief English title in parentheses (for example *de monog.* (*On Monogamy*)). Greek printed via the HTML witness’s SPIonic encoding is given in Unicode. It does **not** include *On the Testimony of the Soul*, Bindley’s general or treatise introductions, or publisher advertisements from the 1914 volume. Where a Bindley footnote pointed only at that omitted Introduction (or at another note not followable as printed), the note is filled or retargeted with a short self-contained gloss fidelity-true to Bindley, so the reader is not left with a dead pointer.

The volume is the **Patristic (West)** voice in Resurrection Publishing’s Theme “Scripture and unity.”

Spelling and punctuation

Bindley's British/ecclesiastical orthography is retained except where clear transcription garble was corrected against the page images. Line-end hyphenation from the print is rejoined. Punctuation is lightly regularized for readability—quotation marks, dashes, and possessive apostrophes—without paraphrase. The serial (Oxford) comma is used when it clarifies Bindley's lists.

Retained vocabulary

Bindley's theological diction is retained (*Rule of Faith*, *prescription*, *apostolic churches*, and related terms). No modernizing rewrite of Tertullian's argument.

Scripture references

Scripture references are normalized to a consistent citation form (for example *Matt. 7:15*, *Rom. 1:8*), while preserving Bindley's chosen texts, wording, and order of citation. Quotations are not silently replaced with any modern Bible version. Bindley's footnote citations appear with the chapter notes.

Version identification

This publication is tertullian-prescription-rp-2026.1.

CHAPTER I

THE character of the present times calls upon us to bear in mind that the heresies around us ought not to occasion wonder either at their existence—for they were foretold as bound to exist,¹ or that they subvert the faith of some—for they exist for the very purpose of giving an opportunity to faith, through suffering trial, of being approved.

It is therefore due to a want of heed and reflection that many are offended by the mere fact that heresies have so much power. How much would they have if they did not exist?² When anything is destined in any case to be, its being has behind it an irresistible cause, and then this cause of its existence makes it evident that it is impossible for it not to exist.

¹ Matt. 7:15; 24:4,11,24; Acts 20:24f; 1 Tim. 4:1f; 2 Pet. 2:1. In 1 Cor. 11:19 St. Paul was probably quoting definite words of Christ; see Knowling, *Witness of the Epistles*, p. 119.

² A Tertullianesque paradox. The non-existence of heresies would falsify the predictions of Scripture.

CHAPTER II

IN the case of fever, for example, to which its own place is assigned amongst other deadly and excruciating calamities for the destruction of man, we do not wonder at its existence, for it does exist; or that it destroys man, for it exists for that purpose. Similarly in the case of heresies, which are engendered for the weakening and destruction of faith, if we are struck with amazement that they have this power, we may just as well feel amazement that they exist; since as long as they exist they have power, and as long as they have power they have being.

Again, in the case of fever, rather than wonder at it we loathe it as an evil, recognized as such both from the reason of its existence and from its power; and so far as we can we take precautions against it, since we have not the power to annihilate it. Yet in the case of heresies, which inflict eternal death and the burning of a keener fire, some persons prefer to wonder that heresies have such power rather than to avoid their power when they have the power to avoid it. Heresies would not prevail a whit if men would cease to wonder at their prevailing so greatly. For either whilst men are wondering, they lay themselves open to an occasion of stumbling, or because they are being tempted to stumble, they wonder on that account, fancying that the great power of heresies arose from some truth that they possess. As though it were wonderful, forsooth, that evil should have any strength of its own. Yet it is to be observed that heresies prevail chiefly with those who are not valiant in the Faith.

In a contest of boxers or gladiators, in very many cases a competitor wins the victory not because he is strong or insuperable, but because the defeated one was a man of no power; and hence that same victor, when subsequently matched against a really strong man, is himself overcome and retires. Just in the same way heresies owe all their

CHAPTER II

power to men's weaknesses, and are powerless when they assail a really strong faith.

CHAPTER III

IT is, indeed, not unusual for this weaker class of men to be edified¹ to their own ruin through reliance on certain persons who have been ensnared by heresy. Why is it, they argue, that this woman or that man, most faithful, prudent and experienced persons in the Church, have gone over to the other side? Does not such a questioner himself supply the answer? Those whom heresy has been able to pervert ought not to have been accounted prudent, or faithful, or experienced. Besides, is it anything so extraordinary for one who has been approved afterwards to fall away again? Saul, good-hearted beyond the rest, was afterwards overthrown by envy.² David, a man good after the Lord's heart,³ was afterwards guilty of murder and adultery. Solomon, gifted with every grace and wisdom by the Lord,⁴ was won over to idolatry by women.⁵ For the Son of GOD alone was it reserved to continue without fault.⁶ What then if a bishop, or a deacon, or a widow,⁷ or a virgin, or a doctor,⁸ or even a confessor shall have lapsed from the Rule of Faith; are heresies on that account to be regarded as maintaining the Truth? Do we test the Creed by persons or persons by the Creed? No one save a Christian is wise, faithful and high in honour; but no one is a Christian save he who shall have endured to the end.⁹ Thou, being a man, knowest each one from without. Thou judgest from what thou seest, yet thou seest only as far as thine eyes permit thee. But "the eyes of the Lord are high," saith the Scripture.¹⁰ "Man looketh upon the outward appearance, GOD looketh upon the heart."¹¹ And for that reason the Lord seeth and knoweth who are His.¹² The slip that He hath not set He rooteth up.¹³ He shows that "there shall be last from those that are first,"¹⁴ and He carries "a fan in His hand to purge His threshing-floor."¹⁵ Let the chaff of a fickle faith fly forth as it wills with every blast of temptation:¹⁶ so will the bulk of the grain be purer which is to be

stored in the garner of the Lord. Did not some of the disciples, being offended, turn away from the Lord Himself?¹⁷ Nevertheless the rest did not think that for that reason they too ought to depart from His footsteps. Those who knew Him to be the Word of Life and to have come forth from GOD¹⁸ continued in His company even to the end, after He had calmly confronted them with the question whether they also were willing to go away.¹⁹ It is of less moment that men like Phygelus and Hermogenes²⁰ and Philetus and Hymenaeus²¹ deserted the Apostles: the very betrayer of Christ was of the Apostles.

We make it a matter of wonder if Christ's Churches are sometimes deserted; whereas the very things which we suffer after the example of Christ show that we are Christians. "They went out from us," says the Apostle,²² "but they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would certainly have continued with us."

¹ Tertullian copies St. Paul's ironical oxymoron in 1 Cor. 8:10.

² 1 Sam. 18:7ff

³ 1 Sam. 13:14. But it should be noted that in the Hebrew the phrase "after His own heart" qualifies the verb, not the object. "Yhvh after his own mind [= uninfluenced by human motives] hath sought a man." Acts 13:22 gives a midrashic paraphrase.

⁴ 1 Kings 3:12; 4:29.

⁵ 1 Kings 11:4ff

⁶ 1 Pet. 2:22.

⁷ For the early institution of the Order of Widows, see 1 Tim. 5:9; Apost. Const. II, 36; 3:7.

⁸ In the North African Church the special duty of the "doctores," who might be Readers, Deacons or Presbyters, was the instruction of the Catechumens.

⁹ Matt. 10:22.

¹⁰ Tertullian often quotes Scripture very loosely, sometimes giving the sense, sometimes weaving together several texts, as in the immediately following sentences. Other instances will be found in Chaps. VII, 8:11; Apol. (Apology) 33. The present quotation has been thought to refer to 4 Esdras 8:20; cp. Jer. 16:17; 32:19.

¹¹ 1 Sam. 16:7.

¹² 2 Tim. 2:19.

¹³ Matt. 15:13.

¹⁴ Luke 13:30.

¹⁵ Matt. 3:12.

CHAPTER III

¹⁶ Eph. 4:14.

¹⁷ John 6:60ff

¹⁸ John 16:30.

¹⁹ John 6:67.

²⁰ 2 Tim. 1:15.

²¹ 2 Tim. 2:17.

²² 1 John 2:19.

ABOUT THIS EDITION

Own the classic. Study with the Church across the centuries.

Hardcover \$39 · Ebook \$19

Available now · Official publication August 15, 2026

This sample ends here. To buy the hardcover or ebook, open:

<https://resurrectionpublishing.com/books/tertullian-prescription>

Letters from Resurrection Publishing — personal notes from
Harvey, our founder. Sign up:

<https://resurrectionpublishing.com/l/s>