

## CANON OF SCRIPTURE

### 1. Questions.

- a. “In the early 1800s, Joseph Smith published the Book of Mormon as ‘another’ testament of Jesus Christ. In the mid 1500s, the Roman Catholic Church declared the writings of the ‘Apocrypha’ to be on par with the rest of inspired Scripture. In the 600s, Muslims touted the Quran as the final, superior addition to God’s holy writings. And in the 200s, the Gnostics added dozens of mystical and mythical documents to their ‘Scriptures.’ Why don’t Christians believe that the additions of the Mormons, the Catholics, the Muslims, or the Gnostics belong in our Bibles?”<sup>1</sup>
- b. How many books belong in the Bible?
- c. Do we have the right books in the Bible? Are any biblical books missing?
- d. Are there any God-inspired books outside of the Bible?
- e. Could a biblical book be written today and added to the Bible?
- f. Which books would we be willing to die for?

### 2. Definitions.

- a. The canon “consists of the 66 authoritative books of the Old and New Testament that are the absolute rule for Christian faith and practice.”
- b. Canonicity describes “the process by which the early church *recognised* certain books as absolutely authoritative for Christians and the church.”
  - (1) The early church did not *decide* the canon. It *acknowledged* or *recognised* it.
- c. The term “canon” derives from the Greek term κανών meaning “a means to determine the quality of something, *rule, standard*.”<sup>2</sup>
  - (1) **2 Co 10:13** 13 But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence God assigned (κανών) to us, to reach even to you.
  - (2) **Ga 6:16** 16 As for all who walk by this rule (κανών), peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

### 3. Concept.

- a. Canonicity distinguishes between authoritative Christian writings that are canonical and non-authoritative Christian writings that are orthodox but not canonical.
- b. Canonical writings are, from start to finish, God-breathed in the sense that every word proceeds from both God and the human author. See *Inspiration of Scripture*
  - (1) **2 T 3:16** 16 All Scripture is God-breathed....
- c. The valuation of certain writings and the eventual development of a canon of authoritative writings are tendencies inherent in the very nature of Christianity. This is because our faith is so focused on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the testimony of the apostles, all of whom are no longer with us.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Michael J. Svingel, Dallas Theological Seminary.

<sup>2</sup> William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 5.

- d. Discernment has always been required when determining who speaks for God and who doesn't. There have always been true prophets and apostles and false prophets and apostles. See *Prophets*.
- (1) **Dt 13:1-5** 1 If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, Let us go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them, 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For Yahweh your God is testing you, to know whether you love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 You shall walk after Yahweh your God, fear him, keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. 5 But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which Yahweh your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.
- (a) The canon trumps any miraculous sign a prophet may perform.
- (2) **2 Th 2:1-3** 1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Messiah and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, *or a letter seeming to be from us*, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way.
- (a) Canonicity was an issue in the very early church.
- e. The early church *recognised* the canon of Scripture. It didn't *decide* it.
- (1) "The church's role is not to *establish* what books constitute Scripture. Rather, the scriptural books make their own way by widespread usage and authority, and the church's role is to *recognize* that only certain books command the church's allegiance and obedience, and not others—and this has the effect of constituting a canon, a closed list of authoritative Scripture."<sup>3</sup>
- f. Many excellent books have been written by Christian over the centuries, but only a select few qualify as authoritative Scripture.
- (1) Outside of the Bible, what is your favourite Christian book? As good as it is, should it be added to Scripture and required reading for every Christian
- g. Canonicity is how the church guards sound doctrine.
- (1) The church is an institution and requires principles, protocols, and policies just as any institution (business, government, school, club, trust) does.
- (2) **Tt 1:9** 9 [The elder-overseer] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught [the canon], so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.
- h. The apostles themselves respected the canon.
- (1) **Ga 1:8-9** 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

---

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 741.

- (2) **1 Co 15:3** 3 For I [Paul] delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Messiah died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures....

#### 4. Criteria.

- a. The term “criteria” is used loosely and with caution.
- (1) The biblical books are not “canonical” because they *meet* a standard. They are “canonical” because they *are* the standard.
  - (2) The 66 books of the Old and New Testaments were authoritative when penned, not when they were recognised. Their canonicity was inherent.
  - (3) No book became canonical through the action of a church council.
  - (4) Church councils merely acknowledged and recognised the canon.
- b. Apostolicity.
- (1) The key criterion of canonicity is whether a writing contains the official, public teaching of the apostles or their close associates. See *Apostles*.
    - (a) **1 Co 12:28** 28 God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers....
      - 1) Apostles and New Testament prophets have first rank in the church.
      - 2) There are no apostles and prophets in the church today.
      - 3) Today’s teachers are to *teach* what the apostles and New Testament prophets *taught*.
    - (b) **Eph 2:20** 20 ...Built on the foundation of the [teaching of the] apostles and [New Testament] prophets, Messiah Jesus himself being the cornerstone....
      - 1) The cornerstone and foundation of the church were laid 2000 years ago and cannot be modified.
    - (c) **Eph 4:11-12** 11 [Messiah] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Messiah....
      - 1) All legitimate evangelists, pastors, and teachers operate within the bounds of what the apostles and NT prophets taught in the first century.
    - (d) **2 Ti 2:2** 2 ...What you [Timothy] have heard from me [Paul] in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.
      - 1) What Paul taught in the presence of many witnesses is canonical truth.
      - 2) Not everything the apostles said or wrote was canonical.
  - (2) First century apostles and prophets had unique authority. Their teachings, whether oral or written, carried absolute authority.<sup>4</sup>
    - (a) **2 Th 2:15** 15 So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.
    - (3) “The apostle’s letters were accepted as Scripture immediately upon receipt. It was a one-step process.”<sup>5</sup>
    - (4) Books not written by an apostle had to have a close connection to an apostle.

---

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Michael J. Svingel, Dallas Theological Seminary.

<sup>5</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 736.

- (a) Peter stood behind the writings of Mark, and Paul behind the writings of Luke.
- (5) The early church believed the apostles preached from the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - (a) “The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ has done so from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ.... Having therefore received their orders, and being fully assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and established in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Spirit, they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand.”<sup>6</sup>
  - (b) “Study, therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles....”<sup>7</sup>
- (6) The church fathers recognised a great difference between the writing of the apostles and their own writings.
  - (a) “I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you. They were apostles.”<sup>8</sup>
  - (b) “For neither I, nor any other such one, can come up to the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul. He, when among you, accurately and steadfastly taught the word of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. And when absent from you, he wrote you a letter, which, if you carefully study, you will find to be the means of building you up in that faith which has been given you....”<sup>9</sup>
- c. Traditional usage.
  - (1) The criterion of traditional usage focuses on whether a writing had been customarily used in public worship and teaching in the early churches.
  - (2) This criterion was more relevant in the 3rd and 4th centuries when the church was able to look back retrospectively on its own customs.
  - (3) The canonical books were copied, passed around, and used for instruction and worship across the churches.
    - (a) “The fact is that the authority of any New Testament writing was dependent upon whether or not it came from the pen of a true apostle or prophet. Other writings could be true, beneficial, and edifying...but not inspired and inerrant. But how would they know whether a book or letter had been written by an apostle or prophet? In the same way you and I can tell whether a letter we receive is from a close friend or from a total stranger—Christians knew which books were authentic because they knew the authors. Almost immediately these writings began to be copied and passed around to other churches. From the start, churches used these writings for instruction and worship. For most New Testament books there was little question whether or not they were authoritative for the faith and practice of the churches.”<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> 1 Clement 42.1-3 (ad 95).

<sup>7</sup> Ignatius, *Magnesians* 13.1 (ad 110).

<sup>8</sup> Ignatius, *Romans* 4.3 (ad 110).

<sup>9</sup> Polycarp, *Philippians* 3.2 (ad 110).

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Michael J. Svingel, Dallas Theological Seminary.

- (b) “The Christian leaders and communities to whom the apostles and prophets originally wrote knew which books were *authentic* (written by a true apostle or prophet), *true* (the information was reliable), and therefore *authoritative* (the apostles had been given authority to lead the church, so their words were commands from God). Almost immediately these apostolic writings began to be copied and passed around to neighboring and distant churches. Very soon, churches began to use these ‘New Testament’ writings in teaching and worship. So for most of the books, there was little question about whether or not they were authoritative for the faith and practice of the churches.”<sup>11</sup>
- (4) The canonical books were functioning in an authoritative way from the start
  - (a) “[T]he books which in due course would make up the accepted canon were already functioning in an authoritative role before they were part of any canonical list.”<sup>12</sup>
- (5) This criterion was not dispositive. *The Shepherd of Hermas* and *1 Clement*, for example, were passed around and used but not recognised as canonical.
  - (a) “Traditional usage was no guarantee of canonical recognition.”
- d. Catholicity.
  - (1) Recognising the New Testament canon was a group effort by church leaders from many diverse regions.
    - (a) “As the books circulated they had to gain acceptance by the churches. Actually there was no book that was doubted by any large number of churches that eventually was accepted into the canon.”<sup>13</sup>
  - (2) The New Testament canon was not decided by a few privileged white men in a smoke-filled room.
    - (a) “Even when we hear about ‘disputed’ books, we should actually be encouraged rather than discouraged because this indicates that the early church leaders were extremely cautious regarding writings about which they were uncertain. However, once they were able to research the origin and contents of the books, they reached a consensus of what was to be accepted as authoritative. The affirmation of our present New Testament canon at the Council of Carthage (ad 397) was not a vote on these books over competing documents but an acknowledgment of the writings that Christians all over the world had already accepted.”<sup>14</sup>
  - (3) The church was too decentralised to allow centralised control over what was canonical.
- e. Non-criteria.
  - (1) Orthodoxy.
    - (a) The canon *is* the rule for orthodoxy. There is no canon over above the canon.
    - (b) “[T]he criterion of orthodoxy seems never to have been applied to such literature as the letters of Paul or the Synoptic Gospels. The reason is that

---

<sup>11</sup> Michael J. Svigel, “ST 101 — Introduction to Theology” (Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2014), 64.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Metzger.

<sup>13</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 123.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Michael J. Svigel, Dallas Theological Seminary.

these had been valued so long and used so widely that their orthodoxy could only be taken for granted: it would have been nonsensical for the church to have inquired, for example, into the orthodoxy of Paul!

- (2) Claim of inspiration.
  - (a) A writing's claim of inspiration was not a major criterion.
  - (b) *Revelation* claims inspiration and was recognised.
  - (c) *The Shepherd of Hermas* and *Apocalypse of Peter* claim inspiration but were not recognised.
  - (d) "The NT writings did not become canonical because they were believed to be uniquely inspired; rather, they were judged to be inspired because they had previously commended themselves to the church for other, more particular and practical reasons."

## 5. Recognition of the Old Testament Canon.

- a. The Pentateuch was canonical as soon as it was written.
  - (1) **Dt 31:24-26** 24 When Moses had finished writing the words of this Torah in a book to the very end, 25 Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, 26 Take this book of the Torah and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of Yahweh your God, that it may be there for a witness against you.
- b. Moses warned Israel it would have to determine, in the future, who spoke for God and who didn't. This determination is canonicity.
  - (1) **Dt 18:20-22** 20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I [Yahweh] have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die. 21 And if you say in your heart, How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?— 22 when a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that Yahweh has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.
- c. By the first century bc, Jews already had the concept that some books were authoritative and many weren't.
  - (1) Dead Sea Scrolls (1st-2nd century bc).
    - (a) "The existence of biblical books among the [Dead Sea] scrolls does not in itself prove their canonicity since some of the noncanonical books are also present. However, many of the Dead Sea Scrolls are commentaries, and so far all of those commentaries deal only with canonical books. That seems to show that a distinction between canonical and noncanonical books was recognized. Also twenty of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are quoted or referred to as Scripture. In summary, the scrolls give positive evidence for the canonicity of all but Chronicles, Esther, and the Song of Solomon."<sup>15</sup>
  - (2) Josephus (ad 37-100).
    - (a) Josephus said the Jews held as sacred only twenty-two books, which include exactly the same as our present thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 121.

<sup>16</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 121.

- d. The Old Testament canon was set by the time of Jesus and the apostles.
  - (1) There are some 250 quotes from Old Testament books in the New Testament.
  - (2) None is from the Apocrypha. (Jude [v. 14] quotes from the noncanonical book of Enoch, but that book is classified as Pseudepigrapha, not Apocrypha.)
  - (3) All Old Testament books are quoted except Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.<sup>17</sup>
- e. The church never existed without the OT canon. The OT canon was crucial.
- f. The concept of canonicity was well established. Christians didn't invent the concept of canonicity to squash dissent.

## 6. Recognition of the New Testament Canon.

- a. The church existed before the New Testament canon was written.
  - (1) Christianity did not begin as a scriptural faith. The faith of the earliest Christians was focused on Jesus, who was the apostles preached crucified and risen Messiah. In the first few years after Jesus' ascension, the composition and collection of Christian writings, the New Testament as we know it, did not exist. Christianity first spread through the direct witness of apostolic preaching and a lively oral tradition.
  - (2) However, it would have been difficult for the church to continue without the New Testament canon.
- b. The apostles believed a New Testament canon was developing.
  - (1) **2 Pe 3:15-16** 15 Count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.
- c. With the deaths of the apostles, New Testament canonicity became very important.
  - (1) Over time, certain Christian writings came to be seen as equally authoritative to the OT canon.
- d. For the most part, the early church had little trouble recognising which NT documents were apostolic and therefore authoritative.
  - (1) "[The] councils did not create the canon or the current version of Jesus we know so well; they simply acknowledged the canon and description of Jesus that had been provided by the eyewitnesses."<sup>18</sup>
- e. However, Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude, and Revelation gained canonical recognition with some difficulty.
  - (1) Irenaeus (130-200), bishop of Lyons, alluded to all the apostolic writings except Philemon, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation. He also alluded to *1 Clement* and *The Shepherd of Hermas*.

---

<sup>17</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 122.

<sup>18</sup> J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity*, 228.

- (2) The Muratorian canon (170) omitted Hebrews, James, and 1 and 2 Peter. However, there is a break in the manuscript, so we cannot be certain that these books were not included. This canon also rejects some other books like *The Shepherd of Hermas*.
- (a) "...The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke. Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ, when Paul had taken with him as one zealous for the law, composed it in his own name, according to [the general] belief. Yet he himself had not seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events, so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John. The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples. To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write], he said, "Fast with me from today to three days, and what will be revealed to each one let us tell it to one another." In the same night it was revealed to Andrew, [one] of the apostles, that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it. And so, though various elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels, nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection, concerning life with his disciples, and concerning his twofold coming; the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place, the second glorious in royal power, which is still in the future. What marvel is it then, if John so consistently mentions these particular points also in his Epistles, saying about himself, 'What we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears and our hands have handled, these things we have written to you?' For in this way he professes to be not only an eye-witness and hearer, but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order. Moreover, the acts of all the apostles were written in one book. For 'most excellent Theophilus' Luke compiled the individual events that took place in his presence—as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter as well as the departure of Paul from the city [of Rome] when he journeyed to Spain. As for the Epistles of Paul, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones [they are], from what place, or for what reason they were sent. First of all, to the Corinthians, prohibiting their heretical schisms; next, to the Galatians, against circumcision; then to the Romans he wrote at length, explaining the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle (or, main theme). It is necessary for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: To the Corinthians first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third, to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth, to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition, yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches, nevertheless speaks to all. [Paul also wrote] out of affection and love one to Philemon, one



to Titus, and two to Timothy; and these are held sacred in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. There is current also [an epistle] to the Laodiceans, another to the Alexandrians, [both] forged in Paul's name to [further] the heresy of Marcion, and several others which cannot be received into the catholic Church—for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey. Moreover, the epistle of Jude and two of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of) John are counted (or, used) in the catholic [Church]; and [the book of] Wisdom, written by the friends of Solomon in his honour. We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter, though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church. But Hermas wrote the Shepherd very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair of the church of the city of Rome. And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets, whose number is complete, or among the Apostles, for it is after [their] time. But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinous or Valentinus or Miltiades, who also composed a new book of psalms for Marcion, together with Basilides, the Asian founder of the Cataphrygians....”<sup>19</sup>

- (3) The Old Syriac Version (end of second century) lacked 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. But no extra books were added.
- (4) The Old Latin Version (200) lacked 2 Peter, James, and Hebrews, but added no extra books.
- (5) Origen (185-254) made a list of disputed or uncertain books that included Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Didache*, and the *Gospel of the Hebrews*.<sup>20</sup>
- (6) The canon was not even a point of discussion at the Council of Nicaea.<sup>21</sup>
- (7) The Council of Carthage (397) recognised the limits of the New Testament canon as including all twenty-seven books as we have them today.<sup>22</sup>

XXX

Tertullian.

“On the whole, then, if that is evidently more true which is earlier, if that is earlier which is from the very beginning, if that is from the beginning which has the apostles for its authors, then it will certainly be quite as evident, that that comes down from the apostles, which has been kept as a sacred deposit in the churches of the apostles. Let us see what milk the Corinthians drank from Paul; to what rule of faith the Galatians were brought for correction; what the Philippians, the Thessalonians, the Ephesians read by it; what utterance also the Romans give, so very near (to the apostles), to whom Peter and Paul conjointly bequeathed

---

<sup>19</sup> *The Muratorian Canon*.

<sup>20</sup> John D. Hannah, *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), 42-43.

<sup>21</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, Darrell Bock, and Josh Chatraw, *Truth Matters*, 50.

<sup>22</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 124.

the gospel even sealed with their own blood. We have also St. John's foster churches. For although Marcion rejects his Apocalypse, the order of the bishops (thereof), when traced up to their origin, will yet rest on John as their author. In the same manner is recognized the excellent source of the other churches. I say, therefore, that in them (and not simply such of them as were founded by apostles, but in all those which are united with them in the fellowship of the mystery of the gospel of Christ) that Gospel of Luke which we are defending with all our might has stood its ground from its very first publication.... The same authority of the apostolic churches will afford evidence to the other Gospels also, which we possess equally through their means, and according to their usage—I mean the Gospels of John and Matthew—whilst that which Mark published may be affirmed to be Peter's whose interpreter Mark was. For even Luke's form of the Gospel men usually ascribe to Paul.... Such are the summary arguments which we use, when we take up arms against heretics for the faith of the gospel, maintaining both that order of periods, which rules that a late date is the mark of forgers, and that authority of churches which lends support to the tradition of the apostles; because truth must needs precede the forgery, and proceed straight from those by whom it has been handed on."<sup>23</sup>

Tertullian's marks of authenticity are:

**Antiquity:** "On the whole, then, if that is evidently more true which is earlier, if that is earlier which is from the very beginning, if that is from the beginning which has the apostles for its authors."

**Apostolicity:** "...If that is from the beginning which has the apostles for its authors, then it will certainly be quite as evident, that that comes down from the apostles, which has been kept as a sacred deposit in the churches of the apostles."

**Church tradition:** "...That comes down from the apostles, which has been kept as a sacred deposit in the churches of the apostles.... The same authority of the apostolic churches will afford evidence to the other Gospels also, ...because truth must needs precede the forgery, and proceed straight from those by whom it has been handed on."

"Tertullian did not use antiquity, apostolicity, and ecclesiastical tradition to determine which books were to be included in the canon, *but to defend the church's canonical books against tampered-with versions and non-canonical writings of heretics.*"<sup>24</sup>

Eusebius.

"(1) Since we are dealing with this subject it is proper to sum up the writings of the New Testament which have been already mentioned. First then must be put the holy quaternion of the Gospels; following them the Acts of the Apostles. (2) After this must be reckoned the epistles of Paul; next in order the extant former epistle of John, and likewise the epistle of Peter, must be maintained. After them is to be placed, if it really seem proper, the Apocalypse of John, concerning which we shall give the different opinions at the proper time. These then belong among the accepted writings. (3) Among the disputed writings, which are nevertheless recognized by many, are extant the so-called epistle of James and that of Jude, also the second epistle of Peter, and those that are called the second and third of John, whether they

---

<sup>23</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.5 (c. 200).

<sup>24</sup> Michael J. Svigel, "ST 101 — Introduction to Theology" (Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2014), 69.

belong to the evangelist or to another person of the same name. (4) Among the rejected writings must be reckoned also the Acts of Paul, and the so-called Shepherd, and the Apocalypse of Peter, and in addition to these the extant epistle of Barnabas, and the so-called Teachings of the Apostles; and besides, as I said, the Apocalypse of John, if it seem proper, which some, as I said, reject, but which others class with the accepted books. (5) And among these some have placed also the Gospel according to the Hebrews, with which those of the Hebrews that have accepted Christ are especially delighted. And all these may be reckoned among the disputed books.”<sup>25</sup>

#### The Council of Laodicea (363)

Long before the Codex Sinaiticus was first penned or the Council of Laodicea formalised the canon, the New Testament was established as a reliable eyewitness account.<sup>26</sup>

#### Athanasius of Alexandria (367).

“It seemed good to me also, having been urged thereto by true brethren, and having learned from the beginning, to set before you the books included in the Canon, and handed down, and accredited as Divine; to the end that any one who has fallen into error may condemn those who have led him astray; and that he who has continued steadfast in purity may again rejoice, having these things brought to his remembrance. There are, then, of the Old Testament, twenty-two books in number; for, as I have heard, it is handed down that this is the number of the letters among the Hebrews; their respective order and names being as follows—[Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–4 Kings (1 & 2 Samuel; 1 & 2 Kings), 1 & 2 Chronicles, 1 & 2 Ezra (Ezra, Nehemiah), Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Job Twelve Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah (with Baruch, Lamentations, and Epistle of Jeremiah), Ezekiel, Daniel.] Thus far constitutes the Old Testament. Again it is not tedious to speak of the [books] of the New Testament. These are—[Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Hebrews, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Revelation]. These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these. For concerning these the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, and said, ‘Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.’ And He reproved the Jews, saying, ‘Search the Scriptures, for these are they that testify of Me.’ But for greater exactness I add this also, writing of necessity; that there are other books besides these not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles [Didache], and the Shepherd [of Hermas] But the former, my brethren, are included in the Canon, the latter being [merely] read; nor is there in any place a mention of apocryphal writings. But they are an invention of heretics, who write them when they choose, bestowing upon them their approbation, and assigning to

---

<sup>25</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.1–5 (c. 330).

<sup>26</sup> J. Warner Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity*, 221.

them a date, that so, using them as ancient writings, they may find occasion to lead astray the simple.”<sup>27</sup>

Council of Rome (382).

Synod of Hippo (393).

Council of Carthage (397).

“Although the majority of our New Testament books were collected and used together throughout the churches by about AD 200, the final, official affirmation of our present New Testament occurred at the Council of Carthage in AD 397. This council did not vote on these books from among dozens of competing ‘candidates’ for Scripture; rather, it acknowledged the writings that Christians all over the world had already accepted by that time—and have received ever since.”<sup>28</sup>

How It Really Happened (A. Kostenberger, D. Bock, and J. Chatraw, Truth Matters, 15-51)

Year	Developments
33	Jesus dies and rises from the dead.
35	Paul is converted and adopts the church’s exalted Christology and teaching on salvation.
40s-60s	Paul writes letters to various churches. Orthodoxy is pervasive and mainstream. Churches are organised around a central message. Undeveloped heresies begin to emerge. Dispute about how Gentiles enter into the church. Scripture teaches core theology. Early orthodox writings circulate in the church.
60s-90s	The Gospels and remaining New Testament are written. These writings continue to propagate orthodoxy. Orthodoxy remains pervasive and mainstream. Heresies are still undeveloped. Peter and Paul dies in the 60s.
90s-130s	New Testament writers pass from the scene. The church fathers emerge, cultivating established orthodoxy. Orthodoxy remains pervasive and mainstream. Heresies begin to organise—a little. Gnostic Christianity begins to emerge.
130s-200s	The church fathers begin dying out. Subsequent Christian writers carry on their mission. Orthodoxy is still the established norm of Christianity. Heresies reman subsidiary, scattered, loose, and disorganised. Alternative views emerge with enough presence and concern the more orthodox writers challenge and discuss them.
200s-300s	Orthodoxy is solidified in the creeds. Various heresies continues to rear their heads. Orthodoxy remains dominant in most regions. Alternatives draw attention from many orthodox writers as a real presence and concern.

<sup>27</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letter* 39 (367).

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Michael J. Svigel, Dallas Theological Seminary.

## 7. Caution.

- a. “Even when we hear about ‘disputed’ books that took a little longer for all the churches to accept (or reject), we should actually be *encouraged* by this news rather than discouraged. Why? Because this prudence indicates that the early church leaders were extremely cautious regarding writings about which they were uncertain. They diligently investigated these writings to discover the truth before they reached universal agreement on what was to be accepted as true Scripture.”<sup>29</sup>
- b. The early church tended to reject rather than accept any book whose authorship was in question.<sup>30</sup> They had very high standards.
- c. From the earliest days, Christians have taken their doctrines seriously and defended them with tenacity.  
(1) Mt 16:16-18; 28:18-20; Ac 2:42; Ga 1:6-9; Ga 1:11-12; 2 Th 2:15; Ro 16:17; 1 Ti 1:3; 2 Ti 1:13-14; Ti 1:9; Jud 3; 1 Jn 4:1-2
- d. The Nicene Creed is a capsule summary of what Christians most definitely believed for the first 150 years.
- e. “The apostles knew their mission was to pass on Jesus’ message to subsequent generations.... The church understood the importance of being faithful to the apostles’ teaching.... The core message of the gospel was tied to the nature and work of Christ.”<sup>31</sup>

## 8. Closure.

- a. The NT canon closed with the death of the last apostle, John, around ad 100.
- b. *Revelation* was likely the last book written.  
(1) **Re 22:18-19** 18 I [John] warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.
- c. The NT canon is closed because God has said everything he needs and wants to say.  
(1) See *Sufficiency of Scripture*.
- d. There is a finality to what the apostles taught. Nothing new needs to be added.  
(1) **Jud 3** 3 I [Jude] found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once and for all (ἅπαξ)<sup>32</sup> delivered (παράδιδωμι, aor.) to the saints
- e. There have been several pauses in special revelation through human history.  
(1) From Cain to Noah.  
(2) From Noah to Abraham.  
(3) From Joseph to Moses (400 years).  
(4) From Malachi to John the Baptist (400 years).

---

<sup>29</sup> Dr. Michael J. Svingel, Dallas Theological Seminary.

<sup>30</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, Darrell Bock, and Josh Chatraw, *Truth Matters*, 62.

<sup>31</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, Darrell Bock, and Josh Chatraw, *Truth Matters*, 149.

<sup>32</sup> “[P]ert. to a single occurrence and decisively unique, *once and for all*” (BDAG, 97).

- (a) In Malachi 4:5 there is an indication that the prophetic witness would end with Malachi and not begin again until the coming of an Elijah-type prophet in the person of John the Baptist (Matt. 17:11–12). Ryrie, Charles C.. *Basic Theology: A Popular, Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (p. 121). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.
- (5) From John the apostle to today (2000 years).
- (6) Every dispensation has had its closed canon. See *Dispensations*.
- f. Scripture is not being written is now.
  - (1) Special revelation and the inspiration of Scripture is distinguishable from the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.
  - (2) Visions and dreams may point unbelievers to Jesus, but they do not add new information to the Bible.
  - (3) Because the canon is closed, there are no apostles or prophets today. See *Apostles, Prophets, and Spiritual Gifts*.
  - (4) Please do not say, “God told me...,” unless you claim to be a prophet. Instead say, “I was guided by the Spirit to...”
  - (5) If you claim to be a prophet, you must pass certain tests. See *Prophets*.
- g. Even if another letter of Paul was discovered, it would not be canonical.
- h. The church has all the information it needs to please God in the Church age.
  - (1) See *Sufficiency of Scripture*.
  - (2) **2 Pe 1:2-4** 2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.
- i. Certainly so-called prophetic utterances or visions that some claim to be from God today cannot be inspired and considered as part of God’s revelation or as having any kind of authority like that of the canonical books. Ryrie, Charles C.. *Basic Theology: A Popular, Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (p. 120). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

## 9. Controversy.

- a. Apocrypha.
  - (1) In the Latin Vulgate, Jerome distinguished between canonical and non-canonical writings. The non-canonical books (Apocrypha or deuterocanonical books) are:
    - (a) 1 and 2 Esdras
    - (b) Tobit
    - (c) Judith
    - (d) Rest of Esther
    - (e) Wisdom of Solomon
    - (f) Ecclesiasticus
    - (g) Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremy
    - (h) Song of thee Three Children
    - (i) Story of Susanna
    - (j) The Idol Bel and the Dragon
    - (k) Prayer of Manasses
    - (l) 1-2 Maccabees
  - (2) Only in 1438-45 did the Apocrypha become Scripture in the Catholic church.
  - (3) The books of the Apocrypha were not officially recognized as part of the canon until the Council of Trent (A.D. 1546) and then only by the Roman Catholic

Church. Ryrie, Charles C.. *Basic Theology: A Popular, Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (p. 122). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

- (a) “The first papal statement on the subject [of canonicity] was issued by Eugenius IV at the Council of Florence (1438-1445). ...Eugenius proposed that the books in the Latin Vulgate be regarded as universally inspired. That is, he obliterated Jerome’s careful distinction between books to be read in the liturgy of the churches and books to be used for personal, private edification. He removed Jerome’s dual distinction in the term ‘canon,’ merging the books of the two sections as equally authoritative.”<sup>33</sup>
- (4) The Westminster Confession (1647) excluded the Apocrypha from the canon and viewed it as any other human writings. The [British and Foreign Bible Society](#) in the early 19th century decided not to print it.
- (5) Protestants are agreed that Scripture consists of 66 books, not more, not less.
- (a) “*The Gallican (French) Confession of Faith* (1559) lists each of the sixty-six books after referring to them as the ‘canonical books’ (Article III). The same list is repeated in *The Belgic Confession* (Article IV, 1561). The *Thirty-Nine Articles* of the church of England (Article VI, 1571) individually lists the Old Testament books and mentions the New Testament list without enumerating it. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Article I, 1647) lists the sixty-six books ‘under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written.’ The Protestant confessions are explicit in rejecting the apocryphal books. For example, *The Belgic Confession*, after listing the books, notes, ‘All which the Church may read and take instruction from, so far as they agree with the canonical books; but they are far from having such power and efficacy as that we may from their testimony confirm any point of faith’ (Article VI).”<sup>34</sup>
- (6) The Apocrypha is useful for instruction, but not canonical.
- b. Pseudepigrapha.
- (1) This term refers to Jewish and Christian writings outside the canon and the Apocrypha.
- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| (a) 3-4 Maccabees        | (j) Sibylline Oracles                   |
| (b) Assumption of Moses  | (k) Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs |
| (c) 1-2 Enoch            | (l) 4 Ezra                              |
| (d) Book of Jubilees     | (m) Gospel of Peter                     |
| (e) 2-3 Baruch           | (n) Epistle to the Laodiceans           |
| (f) Letter of Aristeas   | (o) Gospel of Judas                     |
| (g) Life of Adam and Eve | (p) Donation of Constantine             |
| (h) Ascension of Isaiah  |   |
| (i) Psalms of Solomon    |   |

## 10. Conspiracy Theories.

- a. Claim.
- (1) “We now begin to see that what we call Christianity—and what we identify as Christian tradition—actually represents only a small selection of specific sources,

<sup>33</sup> J. D. Hannah, *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), 49.

<sup>34</sup> J. D. Hannah, *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), 54-55.

chosen from among dozens of others. Who made that selection, and for what reasons? Why were these other writings excluded and banned as ‘heresy’? What made them so dangerous?”<sup>35</sup>

- (a) I.e., *The DaVinci Code*.
- (2) Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*.
- (3) Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*.
  - (a) *The Da Vinci Code* suggests a council of bishops at Nicaea in ad 325 voted on these particular books out of hundreds of worthy competitors.
- (4) Bart Ehrman.
  - (a) Church leaders selected New Testament books that protected their authority and rejected those that challenged it.
- b. Result.
  - (1) Some believers have lost confidence in the Bible because of these attacks.
- c. Response.
  - (1) We must be good historians and distinguish fact from fiction.
- d. Response.
  - (1) The origin of this attack are Marxism and Postmodernism, both of which are suspect worldviews.
    - (a) It is postmodern rebellion against authority and absolutes that is feeding into today’s conspiracy theory the New Testament was determined by a bunch of backroom bishops and politicians.<sup>36</sup>
    - (b) “Those in the early church weren’t clinging to Christ in hopes of attaining social or political power. They did it because they believed this teaching to be true.”<sup>37</sup>
  - (2) Thousands of Christians died for their faith in the first three centuries. Who were they trying to control?
  - (3) Many non-canonical Christian writings were not viewed as “dangerous.” They were viewed as helpful, just not authoritative.
  - (4) These writings contain no conceptual link with the first century:
    - (a) The Letter of Ptolemy
    - (b) The Letter of Barnabas
    - (c) The Gospel of Thomas
    - (d) The Gospel of Philip
    - (e) The Gospel of Mary
    - (f) The Gospel of Nicodemus
  - (5) People indulge in conspiracy theories because they are lazy and are looking for an excuse to doubt biblical authority.
  - (6) Conspiracy theories are just another way Satan uses to get people to doubt the Bible.

---

<sup>35</sup> Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, xxxv.

<sup>36</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, Darrell Bock, and Josh Chatraw, *Truth Matters*, 138.

<sup>37</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, Darrell Bock, and Josh Chatraw, *Truth Matters*, 143.



## 11. Conclusion.

- a. There is total agreement among Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant churches that the 66 books of the Old and New Testament are God-inspired and authoritative.
- b. If we limited ourselves only to those books over which there has never been dispute, our Christian faith is very much intact. The essence of the stories about Jesus remained constant.<sup>38</sup>
- c. The conclusion is: (1) the New Testament books were written by the end of the first century (c. 100); (2) these NT writings were copied and distributed widely by the early second century (c. 100-150); (3) most New Testament documents were explicitly regarded as Scripture by the end of the second century (c. 150-200); and (4) though a few New Testament documents were doubted as canonical (and a few non-New Testament *orthodox* writings were considered canonical), non-orthodox writings were *never* regarded as canonical.<sup>39</sup>
- d. Every New Testament book was: (1) written by an apostle or by someone connected with an apostle; (2) based on verifiable eyewitness testimony; and (e) already circulating before ad 100.

## 12. Application.

- a. Trust all 66 books of our present Bible as the *only* word of God.
- b. Read the Apocrypha for historical and instructional purposes, but don't view apocryphal books as authoritative.
- c. Because the canon is closed, say no to so-called "apostles" and "prophets" today.
- d. Devote yourself to study of the Bible we have, not to the Bible we don't have.

---

<sup>38</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, Darrell Bock, and Josh Chatraw, *Truth Matters*, 58.

<sup>39</sup> Michael J. Svigel, "ST 101 — Introduction to Theology" (Dallas Theological Seminary, Spring 2014), 74.

## ***Bibliography***

- Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*.
- Bauer, Walter. *Heresy and Orthodoxy in Earliest Christianity*. 1934.
- Beckwith, Roger T. *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986.
- Bock, Darrell L. *The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth behind Alternative Christianities*. Nashville: Nelson Books, 2006.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Canon of Scripture*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988.
- Carson, D. A. and John D. Woodbridge, eds. *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2005.
- Carson, D. A., and Douglas J. Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.
- Ehrman, Bart D. *The History of the Bible: The Making of the New Testament Canon. The Great Courses*. 2005.
- Gamble, Harry Y. *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning*. 2002.
- Geisler, Norman, ed. *Inerrancy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980.
- Hannah, John D. *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001.
- Kruger, Michael J. *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament*. 2012.
- Lutzer, Erwin W. *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible*. Chicago: Moody, 1998.
- Metzger, Bruce M. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*. 1997.
- Patzia, Arthur G. *The Making of the New Testament: Origin, Collection, Text & Canon*. 2011.
- Radmacher, Earl D. *Can We Trust the Bible?* Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1979.
- Svigel, Michael J. "ST 101 — Introduction to Theology." Dallas Theological Seminary. Spring 2014.
- Westcott, B. F. *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament*.