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The Maturing Of The Church

If you'll start by turning to 1 John 1:1-3 we're going to open the next to the last event in the Framework series. It's called The Historical Maturing of the Church. What we mean by that is a study of the Church's growth down through history. We're going to condense all of Church History down to four or five weeks so that tells you how thorough it's going to be. But it's important because so many Christians really do not have a good feel for the flow of Church History, how the Church has grown doctrinally so that we have the maturity we do today. I think it's good to see where we have come from so we can appreciate all that Christ has done to build His church to it's present maturity. He has not stopped working since He ascended into heaven and sat down at the Father's right hand. He has been very active century after century directing His body, the Church, from heaven, through His agent, the Holy Spirit whose base of operation is now on earth.

In 1 John 1 we have a passage describing how this growth is possible. It's a passage about "fellowship." When most Christians hear the term "fellowship" they think of their relationship with other believers. We want to expand our understanding of "fellowship" because in 1 John the term refers to receiving the apostolic writings so that we can have fellowship with the apostles and all other believers who receive the apostolic writings and therefore fellowship with God and spiritual growth. In other words, we cannot have fellowship with God apart from the apostolic writings; it is rather through the apostolic writings that we have fellowship with all other Christians down through Church History and with God. So it's this concept of fellowship that opens up Church History as a dimension of fellowship we may never have thought of but which is part and parcel of the concept of the Church as the body of Christ being built and growing down through the corridors of Church History.

Verse 1, “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life—2and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—3what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” You notice in verses 1 and 3 that the apostle goes to particular pains to show that revelation is historic, i.e. it could be touched, it could be heard, it could be seen, all the senses, what we call the empirical senses are listed here. In other words, revelation is not some private, spooky, mysterious thing; it’s something that happens publicly in real history. Verse 2 which you see is marked off by dashes, is a parenthetical remark, so you can leave it out, vv 1 and 3 are actually connected and can be read without verse 2. So verse 2 is stuck in there as an explanation of the “Word of Life” at the end of verse 1, “and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us” The question is when we interpret a passage like this in the text we always like to look at the subject of the verb. The subject here is plural, “we,” we saw this, we heard that. So the question is who is the “we”? Could the “we” be all believers, i.e. everybody who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? Or, is the “we” a smaller group? Looking at verse 3 we see that John says, “what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you,” so the we seems to refer to a subset of people and the “you” refers to all believers, or the believers that he’s writing to at least.

Then, another decision, in verse 1, “What was from the beginning?” We have to answer when is “the beginning?” The assumption of many people is that it refers to the same thing it does in the first chapter of John’s Gospel, back at creation. Actually if you take a concordance and look up the usage of this word “beginning” in 1 John, because remember when you look up words you always look up the near context first, within the same author, the shows that “the beginning” in this epistle refers to the beginning of the updated revelation that came through Christ’s coming, the incarnation is in view not the beginning of the universe. So that “What was from the beginning” is the gospel message about Christ, he says “we have heard it, we have seen it, we have looked at it and we have touched it, things “concerning the Word of Life.”

And in verse 3 he says this is what “we proclaim to you...so that,” purpose clause. What’s the purpose of the apostles seeing and hearing and touching things concerning the Word of Life? “so that you may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Then he goes on to say, “And these things we write” to you, “so that our joy may be made complete.”

The picture then is that of a chain of fellowship; that Church age believers have fellowship with the apostles through the message of the apostles who then have fellowship with God. So our fellowship with God comes through the conduit of apostolic writings. Think of it, how could you have fellowship with God apart from the apostolic writings? We have to go back to the apostles, because it’s the apostles like John who, from the very beginning had the message and they passed it on to us. So the big idea here to see when we start talking about Church History is that the Church grows as it responds to the truth of the word of God, and the truth of the word of God came historically through the apostles. We want to be careful here because we’re going to get into the issue of authority, so let’s draw a diagram. We have God, we have the word of God, we have the apostles and the apostles proclaimed it to the rest of the Church. That’s a chain, sequence or ladder so to speak.

This has created a problem in church history because a large percentage of Christians have held to the idea that you must have apostolic succession in order to keep the intent of the Scriptures preserved. The idea was that if we follow the men who were the followers of the men who were the followers of the men who followed the apostles then we’ll be in fellowship with God. And out of this in the West grew Roman Catholicism because those who were supposedly of apostolic succession developed oral tradition distinct from Scripture and that oral tradition eventually became the authority. The authority got vested in the Roman Church. Finally you had men like Augustine in the 4th century saying that it was only through the Church at Rome that you could be saved. Augustine actually is the father of Roman Catholic exclusivity. So you had that trend of thinking.

Then along come the Protestants in the 1500’s and they threw out tradition completely and said we’re going to have fellowship with Lord through the apostle’s writings and not through oral tradition. So when we look at a

passage like 1 John we want to be careful what we're saying. 1 John does link fellowship with God through the apostles, but if you look at verses 1-3 what is it about the apostles that is emphasized? It's the message of the apostles, the word of God. So it's the message of the apostles that is the true authority and those who are in the true apostolic succession are those believers who hold that the authority rests exclusively in this book and that's our link to God and Christ. So the Protestant position is that we get saved by what? By the gospel. Well, where did you hear the gospel from? I heard it from Joe down the street. Okay, where did he hear it from? He heard it from a pastor 50 years ago. Where did he hear it from? He heard it from somewhere or he read a book or something but it all goes back to where? To the apostles who recorded it in this book. So the authority is in this book.

Now what we want to handle Church History is to divide it up into compartments, the first stage is the infant stage and this is the stage that is foundational for the Church. Everything that follows is laid on this foundation. We'll date it from AD33, or whatever chronology you follow, say from AD30 up until about AD500, just after Augustine and the collapse of the Roman Empire. It's four or five centuries. And I know some people say the infancy was really only the first hundred years, etc. That's okay, I'm just categorizing it because we're going to do this in one chapter and I've got to divide the Church into big chunks. This chunk is going to be called the foundational period of church history, and we're going to look at it because there are lessons to learn.

Here's why it's good to study church history. Church history will give you a perspective on what happens to ideas when they're lived out. If you ever wonder why someone is taking their infant down to baptize them or if they just sit their in church until they have a flash of light or something and they stand up and blurt something out, you want to go back in Church History and find out where that idea originated. That will really give you some insight into what people were thinking that led them to that practice. Church History is a big experiment. It shows you how a doctrinal idea works out. It may take one or two centuries but this is what happens if you believe this way. So Church History is important because it shows you the consequences of ideas. And your lifetime is not long enough to see all the negative consequences of ideas so if you will go back in Church History you can trace it and say, well, that's very interesting, I don't want to march down that road

because if I believe that I see what's going to happen. That's what's so powerful about church history.

You often see this, for example, as just simple leadership apart from our spiritual aspect of life. Think of how people gain experience in leadership positions. Usually good leaders are good historians because we just don't have enough days in our lifetime to experience enough to give us the maturity in every area and we have to borrow that maturity from somebody else who went there. That's why God designed families; that's why children are supposed to listen to parents because the parents have had a lot more experience, a lot more failures than the kids have. Older people have sinned 8,000 more times than kids. And the point is they know what happens - when you do this, this happens. And you know, the kids are so smart and they're immortal that they think they can learn it all by themselves and so they do the same thing and you sit there and say uh, and it's already done...but our parents said the same thing. It's a never ending cycle.

Church history, if we'll pay attention to it, is a teacher like that. Church history doesn't necessarily show you truth authoritatively like the Scripture does, but it shows you historic cause and effect. So what we want to do is concentrate in this chapter, first on this infancy period and see what we can learn about the great doctrines of the faith and why, in the infancy of the Church God did certain things. There's a nostalgia among many Christians to get back to the 1st century church. Frankly, I don't want to get back to the first century church. The 1st century church was arguing over very basic doctrines. They were arguing about things like the Gentiles relationship to the Law of Moses and the gospel and a number of other very basic, basic things. Don't get me wrong, the 1st century Christians had some wonderful things. They had some wonderful missionary work that went on. So there are some very delightful, edifying and powerful things that were done in that generation because the Holy Spirit worked His thing in that generation. And we're not dismissing that; that's the work of the Holy Spirit. However, the Church had a lot of things to learn. The 1st century church was not, for example, really knowledgeable of who Jesus Christ really was. That may strike you as very odd, but it wasn't till 325BC that the church was really clear on who Jesus was. You say *what?* Yes, and do you know what the motivation to think through who Jesus was, what caused them to have to go back and search out from Scripture who Jesus really was? Heretics, heresy,

false teachers, the wolves had to bite at the heels of the sheep before the sheep would move. That's always true of church history, that's one of the first lessons you learn about Church History. We learned it in the book of Acts, the Church didn't move out of Jerusalem until the Church was kicked in the rear. It had to be persecuted, it had to be attacked, it had to be ridiculed, and it had to be challenged. That's the story of Church History, until the heretics started denying the deity of Jesus Christ the Church didn't worry about that. Intuitively they kind of thought He was deity but they couldn't articulate it, they couldn't defend it in a debate and it took one man who was a genius from Alexandria, Egypt, named Athanasius. Athanasius was the guy who finally stood up; he started out as a deacon, and he eventually became a bishop, and was the one who stood up against Arius. Arius was the one articulating that Jesus Christ was not God but inferior to God because he had an unbiblical idea of submission, which he extrapolated as inferiority and it took Athanasius studying carefully the word of God and articulating the minority position at the time, that Jesus Christ was God, that He was just as much God as the Father, but that they had distinct roles; he made that clarification. So we owe an awful lot to this guy. He also was involved in finally recognizing the canon and which books are canonical. He was one of the great students of the word of God and he was being attacked by hundreds of these Arian people and he just stood his ground. So that should dismiss the romanticism many Christians have with the early church. I don't want to go back, while there were some good things there was a lot of immaturity.

The first thing that we noted about this infancy period is that Christianity split off from Judaism. This we'll refer to as A Sense of Distinct Identity. We highlighted five steps in the Book of Acts as people began to realize the Church was not Israel. As this occurred Judaism reacted and became officially anti-Jesus. Think of it, you had Jewish believers and Jewish unbelievers. So what do you think the Jews were arguing about in the ghettos? Who is Yeshua? Judaism took the position that the Messiah is not God Himself because historic Judaism said God is monotheistic. There's no diversity in God, so to say that the Messiah Himself is God is to divide the One God. So you have Judaism take on what we will call a very solitary monotheism. It did not take that position until a century or so before the time of Christ. Judaism had been infiltrated by Greek philosophy and so they had tradition developing along a different line than Scripture. If you remember, when we went through the doctrine of the Trinity we showed in Isaiah there

are passages about the Trinity. So Scripture was being jettisoned for tradition and now when Jesus comes you have this split among Jews, believing Jews start arguing on the basis of Scripture that Jesus is God, unbelieving Jews start arguing on the basis of new Jewish traditions that Jesus was not God. So a split occurred very early on. A few centuries later this split had become so agitated that Christians like Augustine didn't want to have anything to do with the Jews so they rejected any kind of prophecy like Premillennialism that spoke of a restoration of the Jews and their kingdom. In place of it Augustine developed Amillennialism. The lesson to learn there about Church History is that Christians almost always over react. Instead of merely correcting an error they overstep and go so far to stomp it out that they end up in error. Now that early agitation took 300-400 years to work out. But once it did and the Church officially adopted Amillennialism it took a long time for the Church to recover from that error, and we still have pockets of Amillennialism today.

If the church had not early on gotten so agitated with trying to evangelize Jews then they wouldn't have developed these anti-Jewish views and that would have protected the church to a great deal. Think of how a Jew would respond if Augustine got up there to preach and said God was through with the Jews, the Church had replaced Israel. He'd probably fly off the handle, what do you do with the covenants God made with the Jews? That's legal literature; you can't just wipe out God's promises to the Jewish people embedded in legal covenants! Why, if you do that what does that do to the character of God? He's not faithful if He doesn't uphold His end of the bargain, He made promises.

So that's the first thing in the infancy period: the Church developed a distinct identity from Israel and we've fleshed out where that idea went when some Christians got agitated and over reacted against Jews. That's the first thing that happened. That is already happening by the end of the book of Acts. That's why Acts ends with Paul saying to fellow Jews, most of whom were not believing, "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." Paul was frustrated with his own people. But they were rejecting and the majority of the Church was becoming Gentile, they were the ones in the main who were responding positively to the gospel message. So that gives you a hint about where things

are going. The Church is going to be composed of Jews and Gentiles, but the majority will be Gentile.

Now we come to the second feature of the infancy, and that's the one we want to spend time on because it concerns the authority of the Church. What is the source of authority in the Church? So this we'll refer to as The Completion and Recognition of the NT Canon. Canon is a word we want to define. By canon we mean a standard or measure, a set of legal documents. The canon is the list of books that are considered to be the word of God. The question is how did the books on that list get on that list? Where did the list come from? The Jews had a list of OT books and we'll get into that. But then the Church had a list of what writings were canonical and which were not. So the final canon is going to involve two testaments; it's going to involve the OT books and the NT books. Until this list is defined, then the source material for authority isn't defined. That's why this list is so important.

You'll notice in the title "Completion and Recognition." Completion refers to the moment the ink dripped from the last apostolic letter; when the Book of Revelation was finished by John on the isle of Patmos the canon was completed. So all the material existed before the apostles died. What doesn't exist is a universal recognition of their existence and their authority. That had to come and that had to take some time to get to. So there are two actions here, there is the completion of the canon and then there's the gradual recognition of the canon.

When we say the canon closed, what do we mean by that? Turn to Rev 22:18, there's a threat attached to the Book of Revelation, it says: "¹⁸I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; ¹⁹and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book." That's a pretty serious text. It's interesting the NT ends with that. Don't mess with the text! Leave it alone, don't add, don't take away. Now the interpretation of vv 18-19 refers to the literal Book of Revelation, but what I'm saying is that in the providence of God, the Book of Revelation is the last book of the canon and so maybe it applies to more than just this one Book of Revelation, maybe it refers to the whole of revelation. For those of us that come after, remember what's written.

That introduces us to an idea about the Bible, and it's one that we need to keep in the back of our mind because if we do keep this idea in the back of our minds it will resolve this issue of authority and where we go for authority. Those of you who were here when we were going through the OT, do you remember me saying that revelation is historical, it's personal, it's verbal, it's prophetic, it's comprehensive, etc? What we mean by saying that the revelation in the Bible is historical is that if you take a time line and go down through human history, it is not true that revelation is always coming. There are times and places when revelation is very intense and then there are periods of silence.

You'll notice on the diagram there are three great eras of public revelation in the Bible. It is not true that God was continuously speaking to man, through creation and conscience, yes, but verbally, no. If you did a frequency chart, took a graph, graphed it by time and graphed the number of revelatory events, it doesn't come all the time. It comes out like this, there are these three peak eras, and those three peak eras have something in common. One of the things that the first era and the third era have, that is the first column across the Table and the third column across the table is that they culminated in the generation of a set of documents.

Era	Starting characteristic	Authentications of Messengers	Authentications of Message	Vivid Instruction
Moses and Joshua (1441-1390 BC)	God forming a new nation, Israel (Exod. 19:8;33:13;Deut. 4:6-8)	Moses (Exod. 4:1-9, 29-31); Joshua (Josh. 3:7)	To Pharaoh (Exod. 7:17; 8:19); To Israel (Exod. 6:6-7; 14:31)	Israel (Exod. 10:12; 14:13-14); Egypt (9:26; 11:7; 14:4); Nations (9:16; Josh. 2:9-11)
Elijah and Elisha (870-785 BC)	Decline and Fall of Israel not due to false religion (I Kings 17:1)	Elijah (I Kings 17:1; 18:36); Elisha (II Kings 5:8)	To Israel (I Kings 17:24; 18:36)	Prophets of Baal; People of Israel (I Kings 18:39; II Kings

				5:15)
Christ and the Apostles (AD 25-95)	Separation of the Church from Israel	Christ (Mark 2:7; John 14:11; 20:30-31); Apostles (II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4)	To Israel (John 10:37-38; Acts 3:1-8); To Church (Acts 10:44-48; 15:8-9)	To Israel (Matt. 8:26); To Church (Acts 5:1-11; I Cor. 5:3-5).

The Three High-Frequency Miraculous Periods of Biblical History (adapted from Dillow's work, Speaking in Tongues).

When Moses finished what were the documents that were left finally? What documents did he bring into existence historically? The Torah. When he finished this thing it was the law for the land of Israel, it was the constitution. If you go back to Deut 4:2 you'll see a remarkable little note there. What was the last book of the Torah? Deuteronomy. And notice what is said in Deut 4:2, "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you." Does that sound familiar? It's the same kind of thing said at the end of the Book of Revelation. When these eras of revelation end and when the revelation has been captured in a canon, you're supposed to leave the canon alone, don't mess with it. The idea I'm trying to get across is that God does not publicly reveal Himself to each and every saint down through church history. He does not do that, that's not the way God works. He doesn't continually give miracles, He doesn't continually give revelation. He gives revelation in a spurt and then He stops; it's written down, we are to remember, centuries go by, then boom, suddenly a spurt of revelation is given, it stops, it's written down, then we go for more centuries. So there are whole centuries when God is silent and doesn't have any public revelation.

That is seen in the intertestamental period when, if you read 1 and 2 Maccabees, you'll see during the Maccabean revolt the Jews had a problem. The Temple altar was desecrated and they didn't know what to do about it because they said, we don't have a prophet around here to tell us what to do, so we're just going to bury the stuff and leave it here until a prophet comes along and tells us what to do. They knew they didn't have a prophet and they knew, by the way, that if you don't have a prophet you don't know what to do because the prophet is the mouthpiece of God. So all down through history you have revelation followed by silence; revelation then silence.

Why do I make such a point about that? Here's why. You'll hear critics say, well if God is real, how come He hasn't spoken since the time of Jesus. By that they mean speaking historically, publicly. Then you'll have some people say well, He has, He's spoken to me, He's spoken to Joe, He's spoken to John. Wait a minute; He leads Christians, but the leading of the Holy Spirit today is not the same thing as NT revelation. That was when Scripture was being written, that was infallible revelation. That stopped, that's not happening any more. There is no such thing. If there were, Rev 23 would be written.

So the feature that we're involved with as we get into this Canon issue is that there are certain characteristics and one is that the Canon will close whenever God stops giving public revelation through prophets.

Another characteristic is that when the end of public revelation is getting near God's last words are apocalyptic in style. What we mean by that is it's very symbolic literature. For example, let's go back in our history of the OT. How did the OT period end for the nation Israel? They went into Exile, both Israel and Judah, there was a Partial Restoration of Judah, but most Jews stayed in Exile. What kind of literature, what book, highly symbolic, was written during Judah's Exile? You'll never hear sermons on it; I've never heard a sermon out of it. The Book of Ezekiel. The reason you don't hear sermons on it is because it's a very, very difficult book to study. The reason it's very difficult to study is its apocalyptic literature. When you transfer over to the end of the NT period what book do you find that is a lot like Ezekiel, highly symbolic, lots of angelic interpreters? The Book of Revelation.

And why do you think God gives this kind of literature when He's about to go silent for awhile? In conjunction with the closing of a canon? To encourage the recipient to persevere, that tough times are coming and when tough times are coming God's people need to know that hey, there is light at the end of the tunnel, hard times are coming but what I do know is that God has the final victory so persevere. Apocalyptic literature has as its function to generate hope; hope that is based on the promises of God. And so when God is getting near to going silent and closing a canon you will find that His last words are apocalyptic.

You say wait a minute, you're saying that the apocalyptic literature was generated when things were closing down, but the Church was just beginning. Yes it closed very quickly but why is that? Who is the custodian of Scripture? Gentiles or Jews? Turn to Rom 3. What we already said earlier was that very early on there was antagonism between Jewish believers and Jewish unbelievers over the nature of Jesus. And that this antagonism worked its way out in the Church such that most Gentiles didn't want to have anything to do with evangelizing Jews. So in that light we come to Rom 3:1 and the question of who writes Scripture. "What advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? 2Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God." Who then are the writers of Scripture. Jews. And if Jews are going to write Scripture they better do it pretty quick after the Church begins because pretty quick things are going to separate. So this makes the period the NT canon was written a very short period.

I've already started the next characteristic, Historically Interrupted Revelation Requires a Written Canon. We're not going to get through this but this is the second thing you want to have in your mind that when the prophets die off, it's precisely the absence of prophets that cause the need for a Canon. Moses, in Deuteronomy, we just got through saying this, I'm writing this down and I don't want you to change the text, leave it. Moses also said that there would be prophets arising after him, but not in his generation; prophets after him, and he gave certain instructions in the book of Deuteronomy. At that point the writing prophets began to add to Moses' writings; they added Joshua, then the next one was Judges, and the guy who wrote Judges probably was Samuel. Samuel did an analysis because Samuel is the prophet that has to deal with this monarchy thing and so he's going to explain why we have to have a monarchy. So he or his school apparently put together the book of Judges to show what the historical record was. So when we speak of historically interrupted revelation, the revelation stops, the prophets die off, there has to be the word of God made available. So when that happens Scripture sets up an accurate source book for people that come later to understand what God did.

In John 14 Jesus prophesied that this was precisely what the early church would have to do; it would have to generate a written document. He didn't exactly say it as a document, but in John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy

Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” Verse 26 sometimes is sloppily taken to refer to every believer. Why, from the last clause in that verse, must that not refer to every believer but only to the apostles? Look carefully at the last clause in verse 26, “and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” Jesus didn’t speak to me and you, He spoke to that one generation, the founding generation, but they were like us, they couldn’t remember everything so what did Jesus say the Holy Spirit was going to do? He would make them remember accurately what was said. Why? Apparently so it could be written down and passed down.

This is going to lead to a problem, and the problem is the place of oral tradition with respect to written Scripture. Early on when the apostles went around, they would preach. You might be in the congregation, I might be in the congregation. What would they preach? Some of it was the OT. Did they have the OT written down? Sure, you could get access to that at the synagogue. But what about the new things that had happened? What about the birth, life and death of Christ? Do they have any written documents for that? No. Would they still preach it? Yes. So at the time that’s oral tradition. They didn’t have anything else, they didn’t have any hard copies. So they had oral tradition for awhile. What’s the problem with oral tradition? It can get corrupted. So the problem is that oral tradition can become corrupted so the Holy Spirit was scheduled to call to mind everything Jesus said so it could be written down.

But there are groups that still argue for oral tradition. On the oral tradition side are the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church and on the written tradition side are the Protestants. And the one verse in Scripture that has come to the fore is 2 Thess 2:15. Roman Catholic apologists will go to 2 Thess 2:15 to justify their view that the Church has authority by virtue of its preservation of oral tradition. Here it is, “So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.” So they argue, see, right there in your Protestant Bible you are looking at oral tradition that is authoritative and apostolic, it’s apostolic oral tradition and we contain apostolic successors so the oral tradition developed down through Church history must have authority on par with Scripture.

So what then do the Protestants respond to that challenge of 2 Thess. 2:15? The response is that the content of both the oral and the written tradition at the time was the same. Obviously 2 Thess 2:15 wouldn't make sense if the oral tradition contradicted the written tradition. So the oral tradition that existed at the time of the apostles, the oral equals the written, it was identical to it and you could tell because you could check it. Now we have the written incorporating what was then oral tradition. So if any other tradition arises we can go back and check it against the written.

This shouldn't be so hard to understand, the NT canon was being written at the time, but just because it wasn't written they didn't sit there and say, well, we can't talk about Christ and the cross because we haven't got a written document yet. It's silly. It's very understandable that that generation had oral tradition. But the canon engulfed that tradition so it's no longer necessary to have a distinct line of oral tradition.

The question the Protestants raised in the 15th century was that oral tradition had a lot of crud in it, indulgences, the papacy, prayers for the dead. So Luther and others were saying, hey, we have abuses in the Church here, this stuff isn't Scripture. We need to reform the church. Well, how are we going to do that? By what standard? By the standard of the word of God. We have to get back to the apostolic message. Where is that? The documents written by the apostles. So that's why the Protestants were so heavy on their emphasis on the word of God. That's why Luther said, unless you prove by Scripture my doctrines are wrong I will not recant. Scripture is the authority and Scriptures authority cannot be usurped by oral tradition.

Let's go to some NT passages that show the same thing. 1 Cor 4:6, "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn..." what? "not to exceed what is written," ooh, you'd better believe the Protestant Reformers used this verse. Don't exceed what is written; if it's not written then it has no authority, you need not obey it. The Church can quote all the oral tradition it wants but we don't care about oral traditions, we care about the written word of God. Don't exceed that which is written.

Turn to Acts 17:11, this is one that you've often heard Bible teachers use; this is not some new revelation here. In Acts 17:11, "Now these [at Berea] were

more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness,” how? “examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.” What was their criterion of judging truth from falsehood? Written Scripture! Whatever they had available at the time; they took what Paul and Silas preached and they examined it under the light of Scripture. We’ll stop here but do you see the importance of a written canon? If the Canon wasn’t clearly defined we’ve got a real problem because then we don’t know the source of authority. And to make a long story short, you’re going to see that the Church, for three or four hundred years was in the process of recognizing this. It was completed when John finished the Revelation but it wasn’t recognized for some time.

And yet the funny thing about the debate during the Protestant Reformation is that it didn’t have a thing to do with the NT books, it had to do with the OT books. And yet where could you easily find out what books were in the OT canon? Down the street at the nearest synagogue. They weren’t arguing about the Apocrypha. If you open a Catholic Bible today you will find extra books in there, the Apocrypha. They Jews knew the Apocrypha wasn’t canon. Duh, they recognized that 16-17 centuries ago. But that’s what the Roman Catholics went back to to get authority behind their doctrines. They started including the Apocrypha books in the OT canon. But in those books is where you learn to pray for the dead; you don’t learn that out of the OT canon recognized by Jews. So we’ll get into how that started next time. It’s just that we have a struggle in church history. I’m not trying to bug you by going through this; it’s just that Christ is still directing His Church from heaven and there are stages to His directing and early on was the stage when He had the church working on recognizing, what is the truth? What books contain truth and are authoritative for doctrine and practice? How do I know how to live?

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