



## Canonization

### Introduction

- Our subject is canonization.
- The word canon means “yardstick” or “reed.”
  - It speaks of a measuring standard by which to judge all other things. It is an authority.
  - Canonization was the journey to discover God’s standards.
- In Christianity, canonization refers to the collection of the books that were believed by the early church to be the Word of God.
- There are many misconceptions about this subject.
- We’ve already seen that the rise of Gnostic scriptures was the catalyst that encouraged the orthodox catholic church to collect and promote the official list of divinely inspired books.
- Also, it a canon was essential in solving the Trinitarian and Christological debates of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.



## Inspiration Lessons from Systematic Theology



OT Canonization



NT Canonization



How We Got the English Bible

## Doctrine of Inspiration

- Much confusion here – some think of the writer as inspired, but instead the writing is inspired.
  - Writers were not infallible, but sinned (e.g. Peter in Galatians 2). Thus they were not “inspired.”
  - The writings themselves are infallible and inerrant. Infallible = nothing false ; Inerrant = everything in it is true and correct.
- When the 27 NT books were written, God divinely orchestrated the writers to convey perfectly and infallibly exactly what He wanted to be said, but used the language, style, and experience of the writer in the process.
  - 2 Timothy 3:16 & 2 Peter 1:20-21 are direct statements of inspiration. Note that both claim the writing (or message) is what is inspired, not the author. Paul calls it *theopneustos*.
- Ruling out that the men were inspired rules out the argument for Apostolic Succession. Also rules out tradition = Scripture.
  - Explains why other letters by the apostles are lost and were not used by the early church fathers.
- Inspiration rules out the idea that the church “chose” the canon.

## Relationship of Inspiration to Canonization

- Inspired Scripture itself sets out which books are canon, and early church history then corroborates it.
  - The church did not give us the Bible. Christ gave us the Bible by inspiring writers to write chosen texts, and His spiritual body was able to recognize it.
- Within the Bible, it is seen that texts were inspired the moment they were written.
- OT books were already known as inspired by 1<sup>st</sup> century. NT works were declared equally inspired by NT authors.
  - In 1 Tim 5:17-18, Paul appeals to both Deut 25:4 and Luke 10:7 as an authority to justify paying pastors. Paul considered Luke as Scripture – means it is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16). This means Luke and Acts are covered since they were a unit addressed to one man (Theophilus).



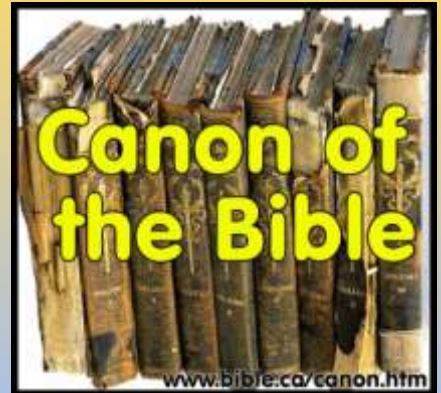
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  - In 2 Peter 3:15-16 has Peter claim Paul's writings to be like the "rest of Scriptures," which equated it with the OT. This covers Paul's 13 books. We now have 15 or 27 covered. Two quotes affirmed more than half of the NT inspired.
- New Testament writers were eyewitnesses, and John 14:25-26 has Christ promise that the Holy Spirit would supernaturally assist them (cf 2 Pet 1:20)
  - 2 Pet 1:16 has Peter claim the apostles as eyewitnesses. 1 John 1:3 agrees.
  - This makes the letters of Peter and John, as well as the Gospel of John and Revelation as inspired. It also covers Matthew's Gospel. This adds 8 to 15.



## Early Church Witness

- With 23 books covered internally, only James, Jude, Mark, and Hebrews remained.
- Christian writers that knew the Apostles affirmed these writings.
- Clement of Rome (A.D. 96) quoted as authoritative Matt, Mark, Luke, 1 Cor, Titus, Hebrews, and 1 Pet.
  - That covers Hebrews and Mark as being recognized as inspired from the earliest days.
- Ignatius of Antioch in his epistles (110) quoted James, which brings the count to 26 out of 27 books.
- Muratorian Canon (170) includes Jude as canon. Traces of Jude appear in the Didache (120). So all books are covered.
- Based on the checklist used by the church to see if a book was inspired, Mark, James, and Jude pass with flying colors.
  - Mark was Peter's close disciple, and James and Jude were brothers of the Lord.



## Challenges with Canonization

- The internal evidence of the Bible itself and the external witness of the early church fathers clearly shows what texts were inspired.
  - Why then did it take hundreds of years to get the canon officially declared?
- The early church saw no need to collect inspired texts in a canon until heresy became rampant.
  - By the time this occurred, it was the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the Apostles were long dead, and hundreds of non-inspired texts had been penned by Christians.
  - That mixed with Gnostic attempts to force their own books into canonical collections gave the church a difficult time in identifying the inspired texts. They had to sift through much.
  - Additionally, during the era of persecution, they could not have ecumenical councils.
  - Fortunately, by the time we get to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, they followed strict guidelines (apostolic, prophetic, etc.) in determining if a book was indeed inspired of the Holy Spirit.
- By faith we believe the Holy Spirit guided them to the right choice.
  - The fact that Scripture does not contradict itself and has stood the test of time for 2000 years proves this to be true.

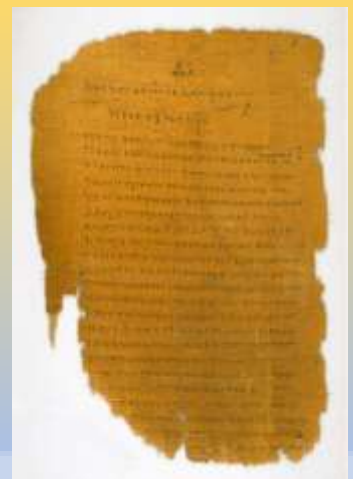
## Types of Written Material

- No original autographs exist for us today, but instead we have thousands of copies.
  - Copies are found on papyri, parchment, unicals, minuscals, lectionaries, and translations.
- Papyri is made from a plant like celery that is glued together. We have 86 of these.
- Parchment is made from animal skin and is stretched and dried out (scrolls & books).
  - A finer form is called vellum.
- Unicals are manuscripts where all letters are capital. We have 274 of them – well preserved on leather.



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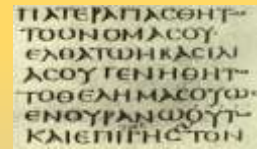
- Minuscals have both lowercase and capital and preserve breaks for grammar much better. We have 2,795 of these.
- Lectionaries are early worship guides that have quoted Scriptures on them. They show all of the 27 books to be authoritative. We have 2,209 lectionaries.
- There are translations as well (Aramaic, Latin, Coptic, etc.). The NT was originally written in Greek.
- By comparing copies, we know what was in the original autographs.



## The Codex

- A codex is an early form of the book where pages (called leaves) were bound together by stitching.
  - They were far superior to scrolls since it is easy to find passages in a book.
- There are a number of codices found, but the three earliest are of greater importance.
  - Codex Sinaiticus is the oldest (4<sup>th</sup> century –325-350). The entire OT LXX, the entire NT, and some popular non-inspired texts. Discovered on Mt. Sinai.
  - Codex Vaticanus is also 4<sup>th</sup> century, and also is a nearly complete Bible, missing a few parts. Discovered in the Vatican.
  - Codex Alexandrinus (5<sup>th</sup> century) is also a nearly complete Bible.
- All three codices had a few non-canonical books in them demonstrating the church was still debating those few non-inspired texts.
- It is also theorized that Sinaiticus and Vaticanus are Bibles Constantine ordered to be made. All three are in Koine Greek.

Sinaiticus



Vaticanus



Alexandrinus

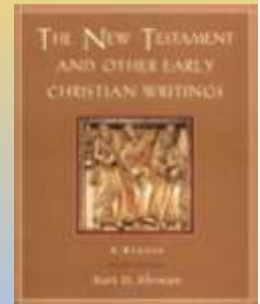


## The Process of Canonization

- How did the church arrive at the conclusion that the 27 books of the NT were inspired?
  - Most books were virtually accepted at the beginning of the debate, but others were vigorously debated.
- The letters of Paul, the Synoptic Gospels, and Acts were not disputed.
  - John's Gospel was debated for a while because the light and dark imagery, and logos caused some to think it was Gnostic. The debate did not last long.
  - Early witness made it clear that John wrote it, and it was not inconsistent with the other Scriptures.
- Hebrews was heavily debated because the authorship was unknown (as it is today).
- James was debated.
- The letters of John were debated since authorship was uncertain to them. A close look at the early fathers showed unanimous belief that John wrote them. Modern textual criticism supports this.
- Jude was debated on the same basis of John, but eventually recognized.
- Revelation was accepted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, but questioned in the 4<sup>th</sup> after Constantine since it was harsh against the Roman Empire. The early witness of the fathers attributing it to John gained it recognition. Textual criticism supports this one as well.
- All 27 books were thus recognized as inspired Scripture.

## Rejected Books

- There were also major debates on some of the books that were rejected.
  - A number of people thought these books belonged, but they were eventually rejected. This shows work of the Holy Spirit in the process.
- The most popular was the Shepherd of Hermas.
- The Didache and the Epistle of Barnabus were also popular, but were rejected.
  - These were rejected as inspired because they were not written by Apostles or close associates.
- The Gospel of Hebrews, Gospel of Peter, and the Acts of Peter were also rejected after considerable debate in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.
  - They demonstrate existence of a Christian Pseudepigrapha. People wrote texts and lied about the authorship to try to get them accepted. The church knew these were not written by the namesakes.
- The Gospel of Thomas was one of the easiest rejected because of its clear Gnosticism.
- The Acts of Paul, Acts of John, and the Apocalypses of Peter, Thomas, and Paul were rejected too.
- Only the Gnostic books were banned. The others were seen as good supplements, but not inspired Scripture.



## Historical Process of Canonization

- From last apostle's death around 100 up to 140, the 27 books were in wide circulation, but there was no consideration to make a NT.
  - Copies were precious, and the massive number of copies pushes all NT books far back into the 1<sup>st</sup> century.
- In that time, non-inspired books were written and spread. Copies of any book were rare and so some treated such texts as sacred. This brought forth confusion.
- By 140, some start to accept some non-inspired texts and begin to question some inspired texts.



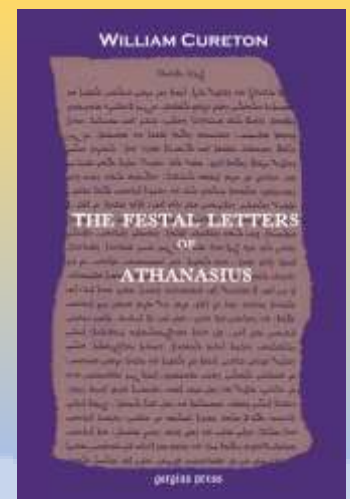
## Historical Process of Canonization

- The church fathers did well for us by quoting as authoritatively from all NT books and preserving them.
- Even by 140, the concept of New Testament wasn't there, other than referring to the New Covenant.
- The period of 140-220 saw the idea emerge that a canon was necessary. Marcion's false canon showed the necessity of a true one.
- From the beginning, Paul's texts, the Gospels, and Acts were accepted.
- Origen's views on it influenced the church from 220-340. He said yes to Hebrews and Jude, but was not sure about James, 2 Pet, & 2,3 John.



## Historical Process of Canonization

- The last period is from 340-400 and the 27 NT books were agreed upon.
  - There were a few small debates, but for the most part, there was such agreement that an ecumenical council declared an official canon.
- 24 books were certain, but 2 Peter and 2, 3 John were debated still.
- Athanasius (influential bishop) settled it in 367 by sending a list (*Festal Letter*) out to all other bishops containing the 27.
  - Excluded from it was the Apocrypha and Jewish Pseudepigrapha.
- The church then slowly spread the list so that a consensus would be determined. Influential theologians such as Jerome and Augustine agreed, and eventually the non-inspired books would be abandoned.





## Historical Process of Canonization

- Finally the ecumenical Council of Carthage in 397 declared the current canon. The books of the Holy Spirit were now formally recognized.
- It took the church a few hundred years to settle on canonization.
- It was not bishops randomly choosing books, or politically choosing ones that agree with their theology.
  - The multiple Christianities theories are historical nonsense.
- The church exercised careful analysis and research and each book passed strict scrutiny. The church walked into Carthage with 300 years of research leading their decision. The Holy Spirit ensured His Word to be canon.



## Conclusion

- God inspires and chooses the books of the Bible.
- The church had the job of recognizing, collecting, copying, and teaching from the inspired books.
  - The church took a long time completing its part.
- Canonization took a great deal of time for the church, but we can confidently say the 27 books chosen were the correct books.
- Inspiration did not reside in the writer, but the writing.
- Canonization had little to do with church leaders ordaining certain books and declaring them Scripture.
- Instead they humbly asked the question of what books did the Lord actually inspire.
- Due to Gnosticism, Pseudonyms, and non-inspired texts circulating, it took the church a lot longer to find the wheat among the tares.