

Can We Trust the Canon?

Last week we studied the evidence we have concerning the inspiration of the scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:20-21). Usually after people are convinced the Bible is inspired, the questions concerning the reliability of the canon arise. How did the Bible come together? Were there some books voted out of the Bible? Do we really have everything God wants us to have today?

In this lesson we will seek to find answers to these questions.

I. What is canonization ?

- A. Canon means **rule or standard for what we believe and practice**.
- B. Canonization refers to the **process of realizing what that standard is**.
- C. In regards to the Old Testament, this matter was settled in the time of Jesus (Matthew 15:8-9; 22:31-32; Mark 12:35-36; Luke 24:27, 44-45).
- D. Due to false teachers, this issue was a little more complicated in regards to the New Testament (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2).
 1. Beyond the 27 books we have in the New Testament today, other materials were being written and passed around among the early Christians.
 2. Examples of these materials include: “The Shepherd of Hermas,” “The Epistle of Barnabas,” “The Letter of Clement to the Church at Corinth,” and the writings of the Gnostics.
 3. These additional writings (some claiming to be inspired and some not) made it somewhat difficult for the brethren to figure out what exactly was coming from God.

II. How was it all sorted out?

- A. The books in the New Testament were written in the first century. They were either written by an apostle or prophet of God.
- B. They were then **copied** and passed around among the churches (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; Galatians 1:1-2).
- C. They were recognized by the brethren as **scripture** (1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Peter 3:16; 1 Timothy 5:17-18).
- D. The written word became more important as the period of **miraculous** spiritual gifts came to an **end** (1 Corinthians 13:8).
- E. Many **debates** took place among the brethren about what was and wasn't Scripture.
- F. As early as the middle second century, lists were being put together by Christians recognizing which materials were to be considered as Scripture.
- G. As time went by, all of the lists started looking the **same**!

III. Three important questions the early Christians had to answer:

- A. Who **wrote** the book?
- B. Who all is **accepting** the book?
- C. What does the book **teach**? This is why the Gnostic writings are not included.

IV. Take home points:

- A. The canon was not determined by **men**! The Roman Catholic church or a series of church councils did not give us the Bible!
- B. The early Christians took Scripture very **seriously**!
- C. God has the power to **reveal** and **preserve** His word (Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:22-25).