

Forging The Canon

We Can Trust Our Bibles

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Over the past few weeks, I have been doing an in-depth study of the life of Jesus Christ in preparation for another website that we are considering doing. I have been studying the historical Jesus Christ quite a bit, as you may have noticed from some of the *CGG Weekly* essays I have done these past few weeks.

At the same time, I have been listening to a college-level lecture series entitled *The History of Early Christianity from Jesus to Constantine*. The lecturer is a nationally-known Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. However, he treats the subject of Jesus Christ and the early church with what he would term "scholarly impartiality." In other words, he does not believe any information about Jesus or the early church unless it is historically incontestable *in every way*.

Really, he does not believe the Bible. To him, it is just another set of manuscripts and historical documents that may or may not contain the true account of what Jesus said and did, as well as what the apostles said and did. What this means is that he really does not believe in the biblical Jesus of Nazareth because he accepts only those facts that he can verify by some other ancient historical document or some bit of ancient garbage or other debris that some archeologist has dug up out of the ground someplace. To him, everything has to be verified by some other thing.

To him, the Bible is not authoritative or even accurate on its own merit; it must be corroborated by something else he trusts more. What he trusts more are documents by supposedly impartial people—and who is to say that they were ever impartial?—or something that somebody had dug out of the ground and interpreted to have been in use during this time. He does not believe God's self-revelation in scripture because he does not believe the Scripture itself.

Clearly, a major basis for the Christian faith resides in the authority of Scripture. Where else are we going to get our information unless it comes out of Scripture? That is what God has left as His revelation to His church. Therefore, all the instructions contained in it will give us the faith to be saved and the instruction we need to continue in the process of sanctification until we enter the Kingdom of God.

We, then, must ask ourselves a fundamental question—and this is really fundamental: How do we know that the 66 books that make up our Bibles are truly sanctioned as the authoritative collection of inspired scripture? That is the first question we must answer because everything flows from whether we believe what the Bible says or not. How can we be sure that we have the complete Word of God? How do we know that we can trust what is written in it?

These are very good, basic questions, and I have set myself to answer them today so that we can have no doubt that our Bible is inspired, complete, and authoritative in its revelation of God to us. We want to have, by the end of this sermon, no doubt whatsoever that our Bible is inspired, complete, and authoritative in its revelation of God to us. Thus, I have called today's sermon "Forging the Canon."

Having said that, I must define *canon*. This is not in any way the cannon that goes, "Boom!" That word denotes a piece of artillery that bombards the enemy. This *canon* comes from the Hebrew word *qaneh*; its equivalent in Greek is the word *kanon*. (I suppose the Greek word is a transliteration of the Hebrew.) The word *qaneh*, in Hebrew, is the word for a reed, like a cane. Remember the scripture used in a prophecy for Jesus Christ, Isaiah 42:3, "A bruised reed He will not break"? The word *reed* there is *qaneh*.

Because reeds were often cut to certain, specific lengths and used to measure things, it generally took on the meaning of "a tool of measurement," as a yardstick is to us. Following through on the idea of a yardstick, that idea leads to "a standard" because you are measuring things against that particular length. That is what *qaneh* came to signify: a standard, a benchmark, a rule. More completely, it is in itself a definition or model of quality, excellence, and rightness.

Therefore, *canon* (understanding its original meaning as the early "church fathers" used it) was the authoritative standard or rule for determining God-inspired texts. As we generally use the word now, in English, the canon of scripture is the accepted list and collection of those texts. They used it as the rule and standard for how they should accept texts as Scripture; we use it today as the list that has already been accepted.

Most people believe that the early Catholic Church decided which books were authentic and that we, the churches of God, have just accepted their decision or that we received the result of the Catholic Church's decision. **This is not true; it is a myth.**

The Catholic Church did not authorize Scripture. I use those words deliberately. They did not authorize Scripture. The Catholic Church merely accepted what was already authorized, codified it, and proclaimed it to their church. They did not sit down and say, "This one is Scripture, but this other one is not." What they did do was judge whether they should include it as their own. The Bible has its own internal protocols and authorization principles. The Catholic Church merely accepted those, and others have agreed.

Besides that, we have so many ancient copies of the New Testament from all over the Roman Empire—not just from Rome, but also from the East, from Egypt, and from other places—that it is clear that the canon was already established before the Catholic Church gave its approval. The Catholic Church merely said, "Yeah, they are right; these are the books." They gave a type of organizational approval of those that were already in use.

This also means that the church of God did not authorize the biblical canon, which is very interesting. The true church did not authorize the canon; it just accepted it. It merely recognized and accepted the books God Himself had inspired and authorized. The church of God, from very early on, understood that these books met the standards of quality and inspiration and then trusted them as Scripture.

In effect, the bottom line is that only God Himself authorized the Scriptures. Men just do not have the power. Men cannot make something holy; only God can do that. All we can do is recognize it and treat it how it should be treated.

Most of today's scriptures are probably quite well-known and not obscure, but I might pull something out of them which you have not thought of before. I hope I do. In this first scripture, Paul is writing to the evangelist Timothy:

II Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Here we have a definition, from Paul, of scripture. Scripture is given by inspiration. It is not something from the mind of man alone; rather, it is from the mind of God Himself. It also must be profitable for doctrine, meaning that it has to move us along doctrinally, spiritually, and in a proper manner. It cannot give us anything that will change the doctrine at all or anything that is contrary to doctrine. Then, of course, he adds, "for reproof." It should be able to reprove and correct us. It must instruct us in righteousness, and it must be useful for making us complete—equipping us for good works and for the Kingdom of God.

In this next passage, we will find Peter's exposition of this same subject:

II Peter 1:19-21 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

This shows that Scripture—the prophecy, as Peter calls it, or the preaching of Scripture—is, as Paul said, inspired by God. Yet, because it was done through men who the Holy Spirit moved to write these things, it is not

something that we can use to push our private ideas. All the things in the Bible are not private to us. They are public to God's church, God's Family. They all hang together.

Thus, anyone's personal opinion is not going to hold much water when it must come up against the preponderance of Scripture. Since there is only one teaching, one doctrine, it cannot be somebody's singular ideas that contradict any other scripture. If they do, it is not part of scripture. All Scripture hangs together.

Peter is in full agreement with Paul. He just approaches it from a little different angle.

I want to review, first, the historical process through which the visible church (meaning the Roman Catholic Church) went to accept the New Testament canon. It is interesting to see how the Catholic Church went about this and then to see how the true church of God went about it. It makes an interesting contrast.

In the first few centuries after Christ, there were literally hundreds—maybe thousands—of competing manuscripts floating around the Christian world. Many of them were preserved, and many were lost, too. We know about them because various heresiologists were talking about them and telling people back then, "You should not be reading that." They made whole lists of works that were spurious. The Roman Catholic Church and the true church of God were trying their best to weed these things out.

From what we know historically—what we can actually date—Christian documents began to be produced as early as AD 49 or AD 50. This would be Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians, written about AD 49 or 50. That is not to say that it was the first; rather, I am saying that it is the first one that we can date with any accuracy. I feel that it is likely that the sayings and the acts of Jesus began to be written down almost immediately after the church of God was founded in AD 31. However, I cannot verify that historically. It only makes sense to me that the apostles would want to put into writing what they had seen and heard before their memories began to fade and to get fuzzy, as

well as before they all left to go to wherever they were going to go. I doubt that they were preaching the gospel from their memories without a single unifying source that they could turn to and say, "This is what Jesus said."

I imagine they all got together after that first Pentecost and said, "We must write these things down and all have a copy of it, so that we are all preaching the same thing." I imagine them all together, with somebody as a secretary, saying, "What did Jesus say? How did that go? What were His exact words?" Going through these things and writing them down as perfectly as they could, they recorded the things that had been entrusted to them, a great task of taking the testimony of Jesus Christ to the whole world.

Think about it: In any organization, you must have some founding documents. Certainly, they had the Old Testament, but what Jesus said was not written in the Old Testament. There were passages He quoted, but He had added a great deal more information to it.

These men were smart men, and some of them even had businesses. They were men, maybe not of great learning, who knew what it would take to be successful in certain respects. I imagine them getting together and doing this so they could all speak the same thing.

I suppose that Matthew may have been the disciples' secretary. We know that Judas Iscariot carried the money bag, like a treasurer. Since there was one office among the disciples, there might have been another office, as well, and I believe that Matthew was probably the most qualified to be the secretary of the twelve. The reason for this is that he was a tax collector. Obviously, he was a man who was literate and used to being organized. He was used to writing and keeping records. With that training behind him, I imagine he kept notes while Jesus was alive.

I do not have any way to prove this, but just from the little bits and pieces that we do have of what these men did—and, of course, we have Matthew as the first in the gospel order—it seems pretty reasonable to think that he was the one who first wrote these things down. Perhaps he did write the first recollection of Jesus Christ (possibly in Hebrew, more likely in Aramaic), and that work was later expanded and translated into Greek, perhaps by him or perhaps someone else. This would account for the ancient tradition that

his work is the first gospel message. It has almost always been the first gospel account in the lineup. There has to be a reason for that. Perhaps that reason is the simplest one: It was first in time order. I am not saying that the others copied him, but I am just saying that it seems most likely.

Place yourself into the situation in which these twelve men were. This is what they would probably do. They would use the most literate among them, the one most used to doing this sort of thing, and have him write down a collection of sayings and deeds so that they would all be speaking from the same page, as it were.

There were many documents that were purported to have been written by the apostles or by their companions. We can see this in scripture.

II Thessalonians 2:1-2 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

See? There were letters circulating around the church that the Day of the Lord had already come, that Christ had come, and that the resurrection had passed. Evidently, these fears were being provoked because there were letters going around, supposedly written by Paul and his companions, saying that these things had actually happened. The Thessalonians were getting upset, and Paul had to write to them and correct them and clarify that He had not come yet. "But rather, look for these signs..."

Thus, we see from Scripture itself that there were letters going around that were *pseudepigraphical*—"false writings." The apostles were saying, "No, that one is not from me. You will recognize the ones from me because I will sign them."

II Thessalonians 3:17 The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write.

He told them that if they did not see his signature, they were not to accept it as legitimate. It was something with which they had to deal quite early on, maybe about AD 50 or 51.

Some churches, as you can see the Thessalonians did, accepted for a while various ones of these spurious letters as either scriptural, factual, or maybe simply worth reading in the churches. Some of these spurious writings were quite Judaic. They were perhaps what later became known as Ebionite writings. They were a group of "Christians" in the area of Syria who syncretized Judaism with Christianity, similar to Messianic Jews—very Judaic. They pretty much dismissed the apostle Paul and all his writings.

Some of the spurious writings were very Gnostic in character. Many of these came from Alexandria in Egypt. They claimed various Gnostic doctrines, such as the idea that Jesus and Christ were not the same, that Jesus was the Person and Christ was the emanation from God that was placed in Jesus that flew off just before Jesus died so that He never truly suffered, and so on.

The apostles, elders, and members had to be able to determine right from wrong, and they were forced to do it because of these things happening in the church of God. The proto-Catholics—the ones who became the Catholic Church—saw the same need to have a standard set of accepted writings. Historically, we have no list of books from Catholic Church authors until AD 140, and the first one actually came from a heretic named Marcion. He lived in what is now north-central Turkey. He compiled his canon of ten of Paul's epistles—all except I and II Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews—and accepted the gospel of Luke, but only with his alterations. He had only an eleven-book New Testament.

He was very anti-Jewish and anti-law. He did not accept Matthew, James, or Peter; they were all too Jewish. That is why he accepted only ten of Paul's epistles and the altered version of Luke. He changed it himself because there were things in Luke that seemed to praise the Jews, which he took out. He even took out the birth scene because he did not want others to know that Jesus was a Jew!

It might be that this defective canon caused the second-century church to determine just which books were canonical. They saw that this group in central Turkey had gone far off the track because they would only accept a few of the books of the New Testament.

Then, too, about AD 100, there was a Catholic "church father" by the name of Irenaeus—not a true church of God father—who argued that there were four and only four gospel accounts, the present four that we have: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He and most of the church recognized Acts, all of Paul's writings except Philemon and Hebrews, I Peter, I John, and Revelation. His New Testament had twenty books. That was better than Marcion, who had only eleven.

Then, about AD 200, there was a manuscript, now known as the Muraturian fragment, which contained a canon of almost all of our present books. However, this was AD 200, almost 170 years after Christ died. This manuscript contains a canon that does not contain Hebrews, I and II Peter, James, and one of John's epistles; but it shows twenty-two books being accepted by the Catholic Church by the time we get to AD 200. It also included the Apocalypse of Peter and the Wisdom of Solomon, both later rejected.

We do not have any other canonical lists of scriptural books for a little over one hundred more years, into the fourth century, although there are perhaps thousands of quotations from other ancient church authorities making it clear which books they trusted. As a matter of fact, it has been said that if we would somehow lose the Bible, we could reconstruct just about the entire the text of Scripture just from the quotations from the church fathers. There is a good deal out there showing from which ones they were quoting, which ones they trusted.

By about AD 325, the Roman church historian Eusebius considered as accepted all the present books of the Bible except Jude. That makes twenty-six books accepted by the Catholic Church. Forty years later, about AD 367, bishop Athanasius published a festal letter (Ishtar/Easter) that listed all 27 books that we know now, and it has remained so ever since. By AD 367, the Roman church accepted all 27 books.

At the Synod of Hippo, ^{AD} 393, the bishops of the Catholic Church recognized only these 27 books as authoritative Scripture of the New Testament. They made it into canon law, and in the Catholic Church, this has not changed since. In most other churches, these same twenty-seven are also accepted.

It is interesting that the Syriac-speaking churches in the east, who had little if any prompting and contact from Rome, came up with the same twenty-seven books. They took a different route getting there, though. Sometime early on, there was an Aramaic-language "Harmony of the Gospels" made. Because it was in their language, they used it instead of the four Greek versions used in other groups. However, over time, they found that the separate books were better, eventually abandoned their "Harmony," and accepted those four gospels.

It is evident that these twenty-seven books all passed rigorous tests of authorship, theological unity, spiritual reliability, and practical use over extended periods of time—so much so that everyone agreed that these twenty-seven were of scriptural quality. They passed the tests. They fit the rule. They were canon. Even so, I will remind you—just to stress the point—that the Bible needs no authentication from them. Scripture authenticates itself because of God through internal protocols, and we will spend the remainder of the sermon on these protocols.

THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

In this next passage, the resurrected Jesus Christ is walking to Emmaus, opening the disciples' eyes, and later appears to the disciples:

Luke 24:44-45 Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

At this point, there were no New Testament scriptures, only the Old Testament scriptures. Therefore, He tells them who He is and how He

fulfilled all these things by going through the Old Testament, which He calls "the Scriptures." He broke them down into three areas:

- (1) The Law of Moses—the Torah, the five books of the Pentateuch.
- (2) The Prophets—the Major Prophets, Minor Prophets (the twelve), and all the historical books of the Old Testament, such as I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth; a major division of the Old Testament.
- (3) The Psalms—The Psalms being the largest book of that section, gives it its name. In this section, we have Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Job, and the other wisdom literature like Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah; also, they included I and II Chronicles here.

We have these three sections. Who authorized them? Jesus Christ did. We have no trouble with the canon of the Old Testament because He told us what it is.

There was general agreement among the Jews as to which writings were valid, and these were the same ones that Jesus mentions here. We need to go to one other place just to give evidence of what these entailed. Here, in this next passage, Jesus blasts the Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers (of religious law):

Matthew 23:34-35 "Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar."

Why did I come to this passage? Well, here He is going to show us the Hebrew Scriptures through this example about persecutions. What Jesus said is, "You will pay for the first persecution and the last persecution," meaning, "You will get what is due to you for all the persecutions recorded in scripture."

By saying, "from the blood of righteous Abel, to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah," Jesus is, in effect, saying, "from Genesis to II Chronicles." You can take note that in II Chronicles 24:20-21, you will find the murder of Zechariah during the reign of Joash (I think). You say, "What? II Chronicles? Why only II Chronicles? That is only halfway through!" The Jewish canon is arranged differently from what we find in our English Bibles. In their scriptures, II Chronicles is the last book.

In effect, what Jesus is saying here in Matthew 23:34-35 is (as we would say it) "from Genesis to Malachi." Since Jesus is talking about persecutions and killing the prophets, He took the killing of the first prophet, Abel, and the last recorded killing of a prophet in the Old Testament, the martyrdom of Zechariah, as *end marks*. (By the way, this Zechariah is not the same as the prophet who wrote the book.) What He is saying is that He considered Scripture to be the whole Old Testament as we know it but referenced the Jewish order of the books. They agreed on the same books.

There was a council of rabbis that came together in the town of Jamnia, on the coast near Joppa, about AD 90, who formally agreed on the books of the Old Testament. The only questions they had were on a couple of Aramaic sections of Daniel and the book of Esther. The only reason that they questioned Esther was that it did not contain the name of God, but they agreed because it fit with the remainder of the canon.

There is no question at all that Jesus accepted the entire Old Testament canon as we have it today. We know also, from things like the Dead Sea Scrolls, that the Old Testament has been transmitted pretty much error-free since the time of Jesus, at least. Thus, in the true church of God, there was never any question about the Old Testament being scriptural; it was always accepted completely from the beginning.

Another way to look at this as to which books Jesus thought were acceptable is to go through His quotations of the Old Testament found in the four gospels and notice how many different books of the Old Testament were quoted and used by Jesus Christ Himself. For instance, if you would care to check Mark 12:10-11, you will see that He quotes from Psalm 118:22-23. You can do this to all the gospels in this manner and find that He covered pretty much all the Old Testament.

THE RULES FOR CANONICITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

FIRST PROTOCOL: ACCEPTANCE BY THE MEMBERSHIP

The first general rule of canonicity is basically what we have just talked about—broad-based acceptance by the members of the church. I put this first because it is, perhaps, the least important. We saw that there were a few little differences. Sometimes the churches, being young, did not know which ones were exactly right, like the Thessalonians who did not quite have the judgment and discernment yet. They did not always know whether they read something they should not have. However, there was little disagreement from early on about the twenty-seven books. We will be able to see why in just a moment.

Turn to II Peter. It is important to know the timing here. Obviously, from what he writes about in chapter 1, he is about to die. Since he knows that his time is up, it is likely that he wrote this in the last few months of his life. Traditionally, he is thought to have died in AD 67; I do not know how reliable that is.

II Peter 3:14-15 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you...

Peter was well aware of the great many letters Paul had written to the churches of God, and he recognizes here that God had given Paul wisdom to do it.

II Peter 3:16 ... also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

About AD 67, Peter is saying that the epistles of Paul—all that were known and recognized—were like the rest of Scripture. If we are to take him at his

word—and I think we should—those are fourteen books right there that Peter considered scriptural. However, what are we to make of this phrase, "the rest of the scriptures"?

Most people, when asked, will tell you that it refers to the Old Testament. In that case, you have the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament plus the fourteen of Paul. What if it does not quite mean this, though? What if Peter is implying that other works were Scripture too? He just mentions Paul in particular because he had been writing about what Paul had written. With this phraseology, however, it does not have to be confined just to the Old Testament. It could mean that there were other books, other epistles, and other gospels that had already been accepted as Scripture also, not just the writings of Paul.

You would think that Peter would consider his own works to be on that level since he was the one Jesus put in charge of things. At least, that is how most in the church of God think. By the mid-sixties, perhaps Peter recognized the canon of Scripture to include all the apostolic letters of Paul and probably his own epistles and James' epistle. If my remarks regarding Matthew are correct, the gospel of Matthew would be included. Then, too, since Mark was Peter's long-time secretary, probably the gospel of Mark would be included in this—and it is a well-known tradition that Mark wrote his gospel under Peter's supervision. Luke wrote his gospel under Paul; if Paul's epistles are accepted, why not the gospel that he had Luke write, as well as the Acts of the Apostles, which by this time had been completed to the point as we know it today?

It is possible that, if we total these, by the end of Peter's life, we get either twenty or twenty-one books of the New Testament already considered to be scripture. That is, if what I am conjecturing has any validity. All we lack, then, are the writings of John and Jude. From all we can tell, all of John's and Jude's works were written after AD 67.

I keep vacillating between twenty and twenty-one books because Hebrews seems to have had trouble being accepted by people both inside and outside the church. The reason is that it is so different from other writings of Paul

and that Paul did not sign it. There is no place in the book of Hebrews where it says something like, "I, Paul, with my own hand..." Hebrews took a while to be accepted, but we know it fits perfectly into the canon.

Turn with me to II Timothy, and we will see Paul doing something similar to what Peter did.

II Timothy 4:9-13 Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come— *and the books, especially the parchments.*

What could this have been? Could it have been—and we know this is probably the last epistle Paul wrote—that he knew he would die? What was he doing? He was gathering his epistles together. He was gathering a book of the things that he had written. Perhaps they were not just his own writings, but they also could have been others'. It seems to confirm that, before Paul's death, he made an effort to collect his writings and others' like Luke's. Those would be sixteen books right there. If we start adding all these others that we are pretty sure were written earlier than the scholars say that they were, such as Matthew and Mark, we are getting up to the same number, perhaps, that Peter had.

We see that the early churches of God were already collecting the Scriptures, and there seemed to be no dispute between Paul and Peter about which books to include. The only books that would have been in dispute would have been Paul's because there were things in them that were hard to understand since he wrote a great deal about law and grace. If Peter had not accepted them, he would not have called them scripture; but they obviously agreed on even these difficult things. At the very least, all of Paul's writings were scripture, but we have to add some of these others. There is just no way that they would have been left out. They are too much in unity with the rest of Scripture.

SECOND PROTOCOL: FIRST-CENTURY COMPOSITION

The second protocol is perhaps the most esoteric of them all—the hardest to understand. For lack of a better term, I will call this the Protocol of First-Century Composition. What I mean by this is that there is only a narrow window of time in which a canonized book could have been written. There was just a short sliver of time when this work could be done. Here is where this idea begins:

Isaiah 8:16-18 "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait on the LORD, who hides His face from the house of Jacob; and I will hope in Him [a messianic prophecy, waiting for Christ]. Here am I, and the children [disciples, followers] whom the LORD has given me [Christ is speaking]! We are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion."

This has a dual application to the Messiah. In the book of Hebrews, this prophecy is quoted, "Here am I, and the children you have given Me." It shows that this is about Christ and His disciples.

The important part, as far as the canon goes, is that first saying in verse 16: "Bind up the testimony, and seal the law among my disciples." Essentially, this is saying that the testimony of God, the testimony of Messiah or Christ, would be bound and sealed in the disciples' lifetimes. It is only the apostles who were given this charge who could write scripture.

We know that the apostle John was the last of the original twelve. He died about AD 100, and it is supposed by the true church of God that he gathered the present twenty-seven books together and sanctioned their use in the churches. He was the final one able to do so.

How can I say all this? Matthew 28 is where we will start. Here we will see the commission given to the disciples. Jesus has been resurrected, and He is giving them their marching orders:

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

One of the things that they had to do was to teach all the disciples to observe all things that Christ commanded them. This says that they have to be witnesses to testify of what they saw, what they experienced, and what they heard regarding the life of Jesus Christ. They had to teach and preach to the new converts everything that Jesus had said so that nothing would be left out. That would be great when it was done orally. However, it would last for only as long as they lived. Thus, implied here is writing down what Jesus said and did so that it would be available to the people in later generations.

They were not thinking this way immediately after His ascension. We know that Paul was not thinking this way either: He thought that Christ would come back while he still lived. However, as I said regarding being organized, they would have started writing things down quickly because they needed to. They knew from the scriptures in the Old Testament that men are grass.

They did not know when they were going to die. It was not too long before James the son of Zebedee was dead. I am sure that, by that point, they began saying among themselves, "Look, these things have to be written down. We are not going to last forever. Our testimony will die with us unless we have it written down somehow."

They needed to do what Jesus said and create a teaching tool for new converts even by the time of Pentecost because many of them would have never seen or heard Jesus Christ before because they were from someplace out in the Empire. They would have just come in for Passover or for Pentecost. The disciples would preach to them, but there had to be something more permanent because I am sure all those people did not catch it all the first time.

Do we see the need for something to be written down, something to which people could refer that could be passed among the churches as, "This is what we believe, and this is what Jesus said, did, and taught?" It is important that a permanent witness be made. I imagine that it was among one of the first things that they thought to do to maintain a unified proclamation of the good news because they knew that they would be sent to the uttermost parts of the known world. John's record of Jesus does the best job of explaining all this.

John 14:25-26 "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in My name, it will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

He promises them that He, though going away, will give them help to remember all that He said and all that He did. In addition, the Holy Spirit would help them to put things together so that all the pieces of the full process of salvation are understood.

John 15:26-27 "But when the Helper comes, which I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father, it will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning."

He says, "Not only will it come and give you the memory of it, but then you are supposed to take this knowledge and remembrance and tell other people. Use the Holy Spirit not only to remember but also to put it together and tell it to others."

John 17:6-8, 14 "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me...I have given them Your word..."

Jesus declared that He had given His disciples the word—the message, the teaching—that the Father had given Him to pass on. They were already full of this knowledge and information; all they needed to do after His resurrection was to go out and impart it.

John 17:20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word..."

They had to not only take in what He had given them and have the Holy Spirit to help them remember it and put it all together but also give it to others. They already had the full revelation in themselves that they needed to pass on. Jesus said: "I have given them what You have given Me to tell them." His disciples would pass on the teachings to others, and it is clear from our side of history that this has been done primarily through their writings.

John, speaking toward the end of his life tells us,

I John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

He says that, as they neared the end of the first century, the apostles had done this: "We have declared what we saw, what we heard, what we handled of the Word of Life. We have made it public, and we have passed it on." You might want to jot down II Timothy 2:2, where Paul tells Timothy to entrust these words to faithful men who will then pass them on to still others.

Turning back to the gospel of John, once again, we will see that John said some similar things to show that he had done what he had been instructed to do.

John 20:30-31 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

John 21:24-25 This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.

However, what John is not saying here is what he did say at the end of chapter 20: "I have included everything that you need to know for eternal life." These are the words of an old man, looking back on the whole canon of the New Testament and saying, "Look! We have done the work. We have included everything that you need to know."

To conclude this section, turn to Revelation 22. The book of Revelation has always been the last book of the New Testament, recorded by John. This is its place, at the end, just like Matthew is in its place at the beginning of the New Testament. Listen to what John says as he concludes his recording of Revelation:

Revelation 22:18-19, 21 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book...The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

This sounds as though he is ending scripture. "Look, we have put it all down here. Do not add to this anymore. Do not take away from what we have written. This is the complete revelation that you need. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen." This sounds as if John understood that it was his job to seal the canon, to bind up the testimony—and it seems he did his job.

THIRD PROTOCOL: AUTHORSHIP MUST BE UNDER APOSTOLIC SUPERVISION

This is very similar to the last protocol concerning the time period and the fact that the apostles had this separate job to do. I made this a separate one because I think it needs to be said specifically. This does not mean that they had to be written by an apostle; instead, they had to be written under apostolic supervision. This allows for exceptions for the writings of Luke and Mark because they were considered written under the supervision of Paul and Peter.

This would also account for the differences between books by the same apostle. It is known in scholarly circles that I and II Peter are really different in Greek. Because they do not sound as if they were written by the same person, the scholars say, "Obviously, it was not written by Peter, but by somebody else."

Indeed, the fact is that I Peter 5:12 says that Silvanus wrote I Peter. Evidently, Peter dictated it, and Silvanus wrote it down. Since Silvanus may have been quite proficient in Greek and Peter was not, Silvanus wrote it out for him in very good Greek. However, the Greek in II Peter is not as refined. Who knows what secretary Peter used for that epistle; it does not say. It may be none at all. Certainly, though, the thoughts are Peter's thoughts.

The same might be said for the book of Hebrews. Hebrews is very different from the rest of Paul's epistles. Because it was not written as a letter, but as a treatise or argument, he changes his style entirely. Some say that Apollos or somebody else might have written it. If so, it was certainly under Paul's supervision.

Paul could have simply changed his writing style to get his point across. We writers do this all the time. You do not write an e-mail note the same as you would a formal business letter. If you are going to write a diatribe, you do not express yourself like a thank you card. Just because the style is different really makes no argument for having a different author. From the early times of the Christian church, these books have been thought to be apostolic, no matter who may have been the secretary for the author.

It was the job of the Ephesian era of the church of God to make sure of this. Jesus Christ says to the Ephesian era:

Revelation 2:1-2 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars'"

The true Christians of the church of God at that time were able to differentiate the true apostles from the false, and that would certainly include their false writings. This is why they could determine what would be part of the canon. This is all a piece of internal evidence, that by the end of the Ephesian era, which ended with the passing of the apostles, the true apostolic writings had been separated from the false apostle's writings—the *pseudepigrapha*.

FOURTH PROTOCOL: INTERNAL UNITY, OR THE CONFORMITY TO THE RULE OF FAITH

This is the most important point of all. Internal unity is sometimes called conformity to the rule of faith.

The accepted New Testament books agree. They agree on doctrine, Christian living, history, and even prophecy. They contain internal unity. They are a whole in twenty-seven parts. They are not contradictory. Any apparent contradictions can be explained with very little effort in giving a ready answer. Most of those things just fall down with a little bit of understanding when the light is shed upon them.

I want you to see that the apostles—particularly Paul, but all the others, too—aimed at this from the very beginning. In AD 51 or so, Paul wrote,

Galatians 1:6-12 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want

to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

He shows here that there is only one gospel, the gospel that Jesus Christ preached, and that the apostles were given it to transmit to another generation. About ten years later, in the book of Ephesians, he wrote,

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body [the church] and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Paul repeats what he said in Galatians: There is only one set of doctrines. There is only one gospel, one faith.

Down a little further, Paul says that the apostles and the other ministers have been given to us

Ephesians 4:13 ...till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...

Again Paul stresses unity of faith—oneness of teaching and doctrine.

Finally, turn to Jude 3, which is later than Paul, maybe about AD 80.

Jude 3-4 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was

once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude writes of a common salvation and the faith delivered once.

Other books and epistles that may have been around at the same time, like the gospel of Thomas (an obvious Gnostic piece of trash) and the epistle of Clement (which is not exactly sound), disturb this unity. They are not "on the beam" doctrinally. If they are not "on the beam," they are dropped off. The apostles did not care who wrote it. This Clement mentioned above may have been the same Clement mentioned in the book of Romans, but the epistle was not quite right. It did not have the same doctrinal unity as the rest of the Scriptures and, thus, was not included.

CONCLUSION

The point of today's sermon has been that there is no valid reason to doubt the authoritative nature of the sixty-six books of the Bible—none whatsoever. What has come down to us is God's prophetic word made more sure, as Peter said in I Peter 1:19. As Paul said in II Timothy 3:16, all this was given by the inspiration of God. We can absolutely trust what is written in the Bible to guide us along the narrow way to the Kingdom of God.