

## "THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE"

## I. A People of the Book

The Christian religion is a *revealed religion*. Therefore, any attempt to understand Christianity apart from recognition of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God will be futile. As established in Lessons 1 and 2, it is the Bible that reveals God's plan of redemption. Nature (General Revelation) is sufficient to know there is a God, but to come to know God in a personal way, Scripture (Special Revelation) is necessary. Supposed Christian sects who reject the authority and infallibility of Scripture may continue to be *religious*, but no longer have any real connection to the Christian faith.

We often speak of the canon of Scripture. By this, we mean the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament.

"Our English word 'canon' goes back through Latin to the Greek *kanon*, which in its turn was borrowed from a Semitic word which in Hebrew takes the form *qaneh*. The root meaning of the word is 'reed' (it is also the word from which our 'cane' is derived) ... the Greek Father Origen used the word *kanon* to denote what we call the 'rule of faith', the standard by which we are to measure and evaluate everything that may be offered to us as an article of belief. In this sense the word is closely linked with the authority of Scripture, because Scripture is the rule both of faith and practice; it was given to teach us (in the words of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*) what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man'. Then there is a further use of *kanon* in the sense of a list or index (this sense is probably derived from the series of marks on a measuring rod). This is the sense which lies behind the expression 'the canon of Scripture'; the canon of Scripture is the list of books which are reckoned as Holy Scripture." (excerpt taken from The Books and the Parchments by F. F. Bruce.)

The Roman Catholic Bible has additional books in the Old Testament that have been rejected as authoritative and are not part of our canon of Scripture. The extra books are called the Apocrypha.

*The Apocrypha* – There were other books written during the time that the Old Testament was written, but these books have not generally been accepted as Scripture. They are called the Apocrypha, from the Greek word meaning "obscure" or "hidden away". They are called this because they are of "obscure" origin; they are not known to be prophetic and so are not accepted as Scripture.

These fourteen books are not found in the Hebrew manuscripts, but they are in the Septuagint. The Jews rejected them as Scripture, but found them useful as supplementary history and exposition, just as we today find secular writings useful. (*This is taken from A History of the English Bible, by Jonathan Underwood.*)

I Esdras, II Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The Rest of Esther, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, with the Epistle of Jeremiah, The Song of the Three Holy Children, The History of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, The Prayer of Manassas, I Maccabees, II Maccabees

A. Read 2 Timothy 3:16 and comment on what it explains regarding Scripture.

- B. Because Scripture is inspired by God or originates with and from God, it is necessarily *inerrant*. Look in a dictionary and find the definition for *inerrant*. Write it below.
- C. What does it mean to describe Scripture as *infallible*? Once again, refer to a good dictionary for the definition.
- D. When we accept that Scripture is *inspired* by God, *inerrant*, and *infallible* (in the original autographs), we establish the only absolutely reliable *epistemology* a man can have. *Epistemology* is the word used in philosophy and theology meaning *how we know what we know*. Or, another way to understand the usefulness of the term is by asking the questions, "What is your ultimate or final source of truth, of knowing what you know? Is it by observation, personal experience, intuition and emotion, or some combination of all three?" The Christian with a consistent world and life view would not discount observations, experience or emotions as though they were irrelevant, but when there is a choice between what Scripture clearly teaches vs. experience, emotion, or observation, Scripture will win the day. This may seem relatively unimportant, but in the challenge of living one's faith out day by day, there is no more important point. Circumstances and feelings may incline you to do or believe one thing, yet Scripture may tell you to do or believe something different. The wise Christian will choose to do what Scripture commands, even when observation, past experience, and emotions tell him to do otherwise. His *epistemology* is based upon what God has said in His Word

Consider the following instances in which behavior that our culture accepts as positive and acceptable is prohibited by Scripture. Read the following verses and comment on what the Scripture says.

1 Corinthians 6:9

Genesis 1:26; 9:6

Genesis 2:20-24

1 Timothy 1:8-10



E. Another important issue regarding the canon of Scripture, especially as it pertains to the authority of the Bible, is the correspondence of the completion of the canon of Scripture with the close of the Apostolic Age. The Apostolic Age is the time after the Ascension of Christ to the death of the last living Apostle. Since the office of the Apostle was itself authoritative and unique to this period of time, it is helpful to understand the biblical qualifications of an Apostle. Read the following verses and cite the qualification specified in each.

1. Acts 1:21-22

2. Galatians 1:1

3. Romans 15:19

F. If there were Apostles in our time (and there are not), there could be no certainty that the canon of Scripture is closed (that there will be no more books added to the Bible). This touches on another important issue that relates to the authority of Scripture—the *sufficiency* of Scripture. If the canon is indeed closed, we can know that what God has already provided to us in the Bible by Special Revelation is sufficient for us to know Him, know our sin, understand His promise of a Redeemer, and know how to live in a manner pleasing to Him (“to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever”).

John MacArthur has written about the importance of the sufficiency of Scripture. He writes:

*Some today are promoting what I believe to be heresy by teaching that there continue to be visions and voices given from heaven. Such experiences are considered to be inspired of God and equal in every sense to the Bible. That belief is essentially no different from the position of the Roman Catholic Church. Catholicism holds to the inspiration of the Bible, but it includes tradition as equally authoritative. In Protestant and Catholic circles we find teaching that extends inspiration and revelation beyond the sixty-six canonical books.*

(Excerpt taken from Is The Bible Reliable? By John MacArthur, Jr.)

The Old Testament is divided into 39 books as follows:

1. Law (5 Books): Genesis – Exodus – Leviticus – Numbers – Deuteronomy
2. History (12 Books): Joshua – Judges – Ruth – 1 & 2 Samuel – 1 & 2 Kings – 1 & 2 Chronicles – Ezra – Nehemiah – Esther
3. Poetry (5 Books): Job – Psalms – Proverbs – Ecclesiastes – Song of Solomon
4. Major Prophets (5 Books): Isaiah – Jeremiah – Lamentations – Ezekiel – Daniel
5. Minor Prophets (12 Books): Hosea – Joel – Amos – Obadiah – Jonah – Micah – Nahum – Habakkuk – Zephaniah – Haggai – Zechariah – Malachi

The New Testament includes 27 books. They are:

1. *The Gospels*. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
2. *History*. The Acts of the Apostles – the book of Acts.
3. *The Epistles*. Includes twenty-one books. The first thirteen are called the *Pauline Epistles* because they were written by Apostle Paul: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians; Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon (the *Prison Epistles*); 1 & 2 Thessalonians; 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus (the *Pastoral Epistles*). The next eight are called *General Epistles* because they were written by other apostles: Hebrews (author unknown), James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, and Jude.
4. *Prophecy*. The book of Revelation, also known as the Apocalypse of St. John, is prophetic.

G. *Some Food For Thought:*

When the sufficiency of Scripture is not understood, what sorts of errors occur?

How does God speak to us today?

What problem is inherent in the statement, “I believe the Scripture is reliable when it speaks about salvation but not necessarily in regard to everything else”?

What is wrong with the statement, “I believe the Word of God is found in the Bible” rather than “I believe the Bible is the Word of God”?