

THE BOOK - HOW WE GOT IT AND HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF IT - Part four

Teaching #1944 - Sunday, January 29th, 2017 - 6 p.m.

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IS THERE PROPOSITIONAL REVELATION OUTSIDE THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE?

Jude 1:3 - "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."

Establishing the canon of Scripture obviously involves two tasks. They're related, but not quite the same. First, we need to know which books to **include**. We began our study with the 24 books of the Hebrew Scriptures. While in a different order and in different groupings, these books line up perfectly with the 39 books of our Old Testament. Then we saw how Jesus endorsed those very same books, and no more.

But we include **more** books than these in our Bibles. We also include the 27 books of the New Testament. Jews do not. And we took our whole last teaching to demonstrate why these books need to be included in the canon of Scripture. Jesus said all the 24 books of the Hebrew Scriptures spoke of Him. He said God had inspired those 24 books to point to His coming and His saving life, death and resurrection - **Luke 24:27** - "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." He even said Abraham longed to see His day.

So the first disciples - all of whom were Jews, committed and raised in their Hebrew Scriptures - realized they had to do something with the revelation they were receiving about Jesus Christ. Jesus appointed Apostles to bear testimony to His life and work. Their writings were needed to guide this new church. What should they do? What should they believe? What should they **not** believe? What did they need to know? These Apostles wouldn't live forever. How would future generations know with certainty what Jesus said and did? Some guidelines had to be preserved to guide and protect this new church from error and superstition.

And you begin to see that the forming of the canon of Scripture involved, as I said at the beginning, **two** tasks. What is to be **included** and then, of equal importance, what needs to be **excluded**. How do we **limit** the possible candidates for recorded Biblical truth? What are the criteria for saying, "No, these may be fine documents in many ways, but they're not **Biblical** truth."

Let's face it. We live in a world where alleged sacred texts abound. Almost every religion on earth has at least one. Why don't we accept these as valid revelations from the same God? Why don't we just merge them all together and forget about the things that divide us? In short, what boundaries on truth claims should be set, and how should we set them? That's the subject of today's teaching.

1) **AS SURELY AS THE APOSTLES WERE SPECIALLY ENABLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR THE COMPOSITION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, THEY WERE ALSO IRREPLACEABLE ONCE THEIR TASK WAS COMPLETED**

We already saw how Jesus promised His Spirit in special ways to establish the production of a reliable New Testament record of Christ, His word, and His church. The promise is generous and assured - **John 14:24-26** - "Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. [25] These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. [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 have said to you.**"

So the Holy Spirit would make certain that, years later, what the Apostles wrote down would be exactly what Jesus, by His Holy Spirit, wanted them to remember and record. But this **kind** of authoritative revelation wouldn't continue in this way indefinitely. Judas was replaced at his untimely death:

Acts 1:15-26 - "In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, [16] 'Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. [17] For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.' [18] (Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. [19] And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) [20] "For it is written in the Book of Psalms, 'May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it'; and 'Let another take his office.' [21] So one of the

men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, [22] beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.’ [23] And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. [24] And they prayed and said, ‘You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen [25] to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.’ [26] And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”

This is a fascinating text. The church assumes it *must* replace Judas. And it gets this injunction prophetically from the Psalms in their Hebrew Scriptures. In other words, they don't see what they are doing as a *departure* from their Hebrew Scriptures. They see it as a *fulfillment* of their own divinely inspired Hebrew Scriptures.

But there is no compulsion to do this at the death of any other Apostle from this time on. Why? Why must they replace Judas - a *traitor* of his Apostolic office - and not replace, say, John the Beloved, or the Apostle Peter, or James, the brother of our Lord, or even the great Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul? This is the *only* time the church bothered to replace any Apostle at his death.

And the reason is vitally important. The *first* dying Apostle is replaced because, as of yet, there is no recorded New Testament letter or document. The *assignment* of the Apostles still lies in the future and is incomplete. The Apostles *must* complete the process described by Jesus, where He said His Spirit would enable them to remember and record the New Testament record.

And once that record was completed, and the Apostles died off, one by one, there was no one else who would bear revealed truth for the whole church in that sense. The Apostles were not replaced because the work they did, as it was completed, was simply *irreplaceable* and *non-repeatable*.

2) THE APOSTLE PAUL RECEIVED HIS UNUSUAL APOSTOLIC CALLING ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS AND SPECIFICALLY SAYS HE WAS THE "LAST" IN LINE

1 Corinthians 15:7-9 - “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. [8] *Last of all*, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. [9] For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

So Jesus didn't just go on and on calling Apostles to form the New Testament cannon. Paul says he was the last one to be called of the original Apostles. Their work formed a *finished* revelation for the church:

Jude 1:3 - “Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

The important words are those words *“once for all delivered....”* So this wasn't updated or added to year by year or century by century. The church always goes back to what was *“once for all delivered.”* There are no additions or updates. And the fact that we're told to *“contend”* for this truth shows that people will *want* to add to what was once delivered. They'll say it's outdated. They'll say it's irrelevant. They'll say it doesn't fit the culture. And the writer says, *“Fight for this! If you don't, it's going to slip away from you!”*

3) PETER SAW PAUL'S WRITINGS AS AN EXPANSION OF WHAT ALREADY EXISTED IN THE ORIGINAL HEBREW CANON OF THE SCRIPTURES

2 Peter 3:14-16 - “Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. [15] And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, [16] as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.”

Peter recognizes that there is this body of truth already known by his readers. They already will know what he's talking about when he says *“the Scriptures”* (16). The church is already in agreement over this canon of truth - these 24 books of the Hebrew Scriptures. Then he says something striking. He *includes* Paul's writings with them. That's why he says people twist Paul's writings just like they do the *“other”* Scriptures. Paul's letters are in that same body - *“the Scriptures.”* So Paul has the endorsement of the original Apostles in a way no other self-appointed Apostle has.

So consider how huge this is. Let your mind grab hold of what we're observing. These devout Jewish disciples - these passionate followers of the Hebrew canon of the Scriptures - are doing something unheard of up to this point. The canon is **expanding** just as Jesus planned and prepared for it to do.

4) **THE WRITINGS OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS TOGETHER FORM THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE, DOCTRINE, AND MINISTRY**

Ephesians 2:19-20 - "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone....**"

The whole church, says Paul, rests down on only one foundation. It's not a **repeatable** foundation. Other things get built on top of it, but the foundation is established and finished. All ministries, all teaching, all discipline, all worship - it all rests down on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets. And Apostles are mentioned **first** even though they came **second** chronologically because, as we studied this morning, the partial revelation of the Old Testament is interpreted through the lens of the completed revelation of the New.

You can see how this theology worked itself out in Paul's everyday ministry. This wasn't just theory to Paul. All sorts of different things were happening, even in the church of Paul's time. We have examples of some of them:

1 Corinthians 14:37-40 - "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. [38] If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. [39] So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. [40] But all things should be done decently and in order."

Notice, Paul doesn't take the path many people today take. He doesn't deny that there are prophetic words for the church or gifts given for the church by the Holy Spirit. Paul's not playing **John MacArthur** here. He's not anti-charismatic. But he still honors the foundation. He actually **regulates** other prophetic functions and giftings by the foundation of his Apostolic office. He **measures** their authenticity by the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets.

So are there still revelations? Well, yes and no. There are still prophetic words given to the church. And there are still apostles, in the sense of an apostolic calling to new people groups and unreached lands. But there is no longer given any revelation that is universally binding for the doctrine and practice of the church. And there is no apostle who stands in authority over you in the content of your Christian faith.

There **are** Apostles who have spiritual authority over my walk with Jesus. They're all **dead**. They live in the pages of the New Testament. The Apostles in the pages of the New Testament have binding teaching authority over all the church until Jesus comes back. Though they're all dead, they regulate our doctrine and exclude all contrary teaching.

Yes, God still speaks to people. Yes, we know the voice of the Good Shepherd. But the **way** we know it is His Words abide in us by His Spirit through the inspired pages of the New Testament. If any revelation does an "end run" around the Scriptures, I don't buy into it. And nor should you. Our faith, while living and vital, is a completely **delivered** faith. And it's the only message that had the power to reach the lost and preserve those being sanctified by it.