

Canon & Text — 2 & 9 January 2022

THE TEXT: CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

Responding To Contemporary Challenges

I. The _____ of Scripture: Do We Have The _____?

THE DATA

The NT books were not the only writings produced the early Christians. Other Christian writings were left out of the New Testament. Some non-canonical books were viewed as authoritative in some church settings. Some NT books were universally accepted as authoritative later than others.

THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE

There was no normative Christianity during the first three centuries. There were a variety of early "Christianities," each with its own theology and its own collection of sacred texts. The consolidation of the institutional church in the fourth century, under the imperial rule of pro-Christian Constantine and his successors, resulted in the repression of alternative expressions of Christianity, along with the exclusion of their documents from the NT canon.

A REASONED RESPONSE

Most of the sorting out of inspired versus non-inspired texts had occurred long before the legalization of Christianity (313 AD), during a time when "alternative Christianities" would have had every opportunity to reproduce their gospels and attract followers.

ATTRIBUTES OF CANONICITY

- _____ — Written during the apostolic age, before the last of the apostles had died.
- _____ — Faithful to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.
- _____ — Widespread usage throughout the empire over long periods of time.

SCRIPTURE, CHURCH, STATE & THE PROCESS OF CANONIZATION:

The NT documents were recognized as Scripture long before a centralized church—or a "Christianized" empire—ever had the authority to determine the limits of the canon.

#1 — _____ :

2 Timothy 3:16 — *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*

Hebrews 4:12 — *The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

#2 — _____ :

John 10:27 — *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."*

1 Timothy 5:18 — *The Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain” (Deuteronomy 25:4) and, “The laborer deserves his wages” (Luke 10:7).*

2 Peter 3:15-16 — *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, 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.*

#3 — _____ :

367 AD — Easter Letter of Athanasius of Alexandria to the rest of the church lists 27 books of the NT.

393 AD & 397 AD — Councils of Hippo & Carthage ratify the recognition of the same 27 books.

II. The _____ of Scripture: *Can We Trust The _____ ?*

THE DATA

We do not have the original manuscripts of the NT books. The copies we possess have altogether somewhere between 200,000 and 400,000 variant readings.

THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE

Because there are so many variants we cannot with confidence know what the NT authors originally wrote.

A REASONED RESPONSE

The number and date of our NT manuscripts—and the science of textual criticism— allow us to reconstruct a text the credibility of which far exceeds that of any ancient, non-biblical document.

- There are @ 25,000 manuscripts of the New Testament in Greek and other ancient languages. $400,000 \text{ variants} \div 25,000 \text{ manuscripts} = 16 \text{ variants per manuscript}$.
- The vast majority of variants are obvious errors made in the copying process. Of the rest, only 1,438 variants were deemed significant enough to be listed in the standard edition of the Greek New Testament (UBS⁴). Only @ .1% of the variants are interesting enough to make their way into the footnotes in most English translations.
- No doctrine or ethical practice of Christianity depends solely on any disputed reading.

III. The _____ of Scripture: *Is The Bible _____ ?*

Mark 16:6-8 — *6 “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” 8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.*

Josephus — *Put not trust in a single witness, but let there be three or at least two, whose evidence shall be accredited by their past lives. From women let no evidence be accepted, because of the levity and temerity of their sex (Antiquities, 4.219).*