

“THE BOOKS OF THE BOOK.”

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March 24, 2013, 6:00PM

Sermon Texts: John 21:25; II Peter 3:15-16; Revelation 22:18-19

Introduction.

All religions have teachings and traditions that are passed down and revered and believed. Many of the larger or higher religions have their holy books.

Hinduism has the Vedas and Upanishads (oo-pan-i-shads) of which the Baghavad Gita is a part.

Buddhism has the Tripataka (nearly 40 volumes).

Islam has the Koran (Quran).

Judaism has the Torah and the OT.

Christianity has the Holy Bible.

When we talk about the Holy Bible we sometimes refer to it as the canon of Scripture. The word *canon* means a rule or a standard, a measure, a rod for keeping things straight. It's like a carpenter's rule, to give a straight and true line.

By canon of Scripture we are talking about what belongs in the Bible and what does not, as our standard and measure.

How did the canon come to be and how did it get its authority and when did the church officially recognize these particular 66 books?

We should not underestimate the importance of these questions. God's Word is our life, our spiritual life depends on it. We must know with confidence what's from God and what's not.

Deuteronomy 32:46 he said to them, “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. 47 For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”

Deuteronomy 4:2 You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you.

We believe the writings of Scripture are true and authoritative for all we believe and practice. They are our only rule of faith and practice. But how did they come to be written and collected into one volume with two parts, the Old and New Testaments?

The Writing of the Old Testament.

We know that God started the writing process by handwriting the Ten Commandments on stone tablets and giving them to Moses. Moses added to that the first five books:

Deuteronomy 31:24-26 When Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book to the very end, 25 Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, 26

“Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against you.

Joshua wrote more:

Joshua 24:26 And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God.

I Samuel 10:25 Then Samuel told the people the rights and duties of the kingship, and he wrote them in a book and laid it up before the Lord.

I Chronicles 29:29 Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the Chronicles of Samuel the seer, and in the Chronicles of Nathan the prophet, and in the Chronicles of Gad the seer.

II Kings 22:13 “Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”

This book was recognized as authoritative, as from the Lord.

Nehemiah 8:8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

This text tells us the Jews possessed writings that they recognized as divine and authoritative.

Historically we know that all the writings of the OT were collected into one volume by a gathering of learned Jewish scribes called the Great Synagogue around 300 BC. The entire OT was available to Jesus and the Apostles. There was no argument or discussion about what was in and what wasn't in. Everyone seemed to be in full agreement about the canon of the OT.

Jesus referred to the OT and quoted it repeatedly. He referred to it as the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17, 7:12, etc) or the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms (Luke 24:44). Jesus and the apostles quoted the OT nearly 300 times and viewed it with divine authority, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

In one verse Jesus referenced an incident from the first book and the last book of the OT (in Hebrew Scriptures II Chronicles is last book).

Matthew 23:35 ... from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, ...

31 of the 39 books of the OT are quoted in the NT, all except Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Obadiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah.

A historical catalyst for clarifying the OT canon may have been the emergence of the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphal books. No apocryphal book is ever quoted by Jesus or the apostles. The Jews never once considered them to have divine authority.

The Writing of the New Testament.

Jesus anticipated the apostles writing in John 14 and 16:

John 14:26 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.

John 16:13-14 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The apostles of the NT are put on equal footing with the prophets of the OT.

Ephesians 2:19-20 ... the household of God, 20 *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

In the NT there are also references to Paul's letters as authoritative.

Colossians 4:16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

II Peter 3:15-16 ... 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*.

Historically we know that between the years 100 and 400 AD the apostolic writings were recognized as authoritative. Strong impetus for clarifying the canon came when the heretic Marcion started teaching that the only valid books were a corrupted version of Luke and ten of Paul's letters. At the Council of Carthage in 397 AD the church publically confessed what she had already long believed. The church did not create the canon, but merely recognized the books that bore the marks of canonicity.

The marks of Canonicity.

OT – by a known and recognized prophet.

NT – by a known and recognized apostle or one very closely associated with an apostle who received apostolic endorsement (Mark, Luke, James, Jude).

Furthermore, their writings had to be received as authoritative by the early church and their writings had to be in harmony with the rest of the books.

In history there were some small debates about Hebrews, James, II Peter, II and III John, Jude and Revelation. These all passed the test of canonicity.

There was also a bit of discussion about adding I Clement, The Shepherd of Hermas, and The Didache. But these three were not written by apostles and their writers acknowledged their authority was subordinate to the apostles.

Of course on a grand scale the Holy Spirit of God was supernaturally and sovereignly guiding and preserving and protecting. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the writers also preserved

their writings. God was personally active in guiding His Church to receive and preserve and pass on His Word.

The Holy Spirit enabled the church to discern that these books constituted the Word of God and to have faith in them.

The list in Article 4 of the Belgic Confession raises several questions.

Why did Guido deBres include an actual list of the books of the Bible?

He had to do it to reaffirm that the canon of Scripture was closed and could not be added to or subtracted from. This very thing was going on in his day.

One, the Roman Catholics had officially added the Apocrypha at the Council of Trent, 1547.

Two, the Anabaptist said NT superseded the OT with a better picture of God, a God of love rather than a God of wrath, so they cut out the OT.

Three, Martin Luther was critical of the book of James and treated it as secondary.

Why do we need this list today?

We must continue to affirm a closed canon because there continue to be unrelenting attacks on the validity and credibility and authority of the Bible.

One, the Roman Catholics and some Anglican traditions continue to add the Apocrypha.

We will talk about the Apocrypha in BC Article 6.

Two, the liberal notion of a canon within the canon, implying only some parts are infallible.

Three, the pressure to include the so-called “lost books of the Bible.”

Four, because of many cults:

The Mormons add to the Word of God their Book of Mormon.

The Christian Science cult adds to the Word of God the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures.

The Seventh Day Adventists add the writings of Ellen White.

Some Pentecostals and Charismatics add so-called “spirit-inspired” prophecies and tongues. For them the canon of revelation is still open.

In more recent times since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls others have called for additions.

Today Dr. Bart Ehrman, professor at University of North Carolina is one of main attackers.

The canon is closed. It cannot be added to or taken away from. This is the clearly defined, definitive, divine Word of God, without error, inerrant and infallible.

Revelation 22:18-19 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

***Further questions and affirmations from Article Four:
The Five Books of Moses.***

Over the past 150 years liberals have vigorously attacked the view that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, the first five books. But scholarly rebuttals have dismissed their lies. Moses wrote it all except the last chapter added about his death.

Paralipomenon

It means “omitted things, or things left out, or left overs.” The two Chronicles are a sort of supplement to the books of Kings, meaning I and II Samuel and I and II Kings.

Paralipomenon is an old Greek word, used in Guido de Bres time but not in ours.

I am glad that Pastor John Van Schepen was not my examiner for my oral exam (Colloquium Doctum) at Classis. He liked to trip up students by asking if they fully believed and subscribed to the Belgic Confession to which they would always say yes, of course. Then he would ask, so you believe in the Paralipomenon and he would get blank deer in the head lights stares.

The Psalms of David

Not all of them were written by David (Moses, Solomon, Asaph). But the collection is generally recognized by the author of the majority of the Psalms, so it is given the general designation, The Psalms of David. We can speak of the Psalms of David in a general way without meaning that he is the author of all 150.

The three books of Solomon.

Again this is a generalization with regard to Proverbs while we know that chapter 30 is written by Agur. Solomon may have been the compiler of the Proverbs and not the author of all of them.

Lamentations left off list

There are only 65 books listed. Lamentations is not omitted, rather it's included with Jeremiah's prophecy.

Hebrews is listed under Paul's letters

Hebrews may or may not have been written by Paul. But what cannot be argued is that Hebrews should not be in the Bible. No one questions its canonicity.

A student being examined for ordination may question the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, but he may not question its canonicity.

James and Jude are listed as other apostles.

James and Jude were half-brothers of Jesus and not part of the original twelve apostles. In fact, neither were Mark or Luke. We can consider them apostles in as much as they wrote in the apostolic age and their writings were received with apostolic authority by the church. Their writings bear all the marks of canonicity.

The main point of Article 4 of the Belgic Confession is to declare what is included in the canon and not necessarily who wrote each part. It's about divine authority, not human authorship.

Why were some books left out?

One or two letters to Corinthians and a letter to the Laodicians.

I Corinthians 5:9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people

Colossians 4:16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

Should we include these lost books if they are found? No. The Holy Spirit did not preserve them for the church in all ages.

“No books truly canonical have perished, and if any have perished, they were not worthy of this character” (Francis Turretin).

We believe the canon of Scripture is pure (containing nothing that shouldn't be there) and complete (not lacking any book that should be there).

This is God's authoritative revelation. This is what He has personally entrusted to His Church, “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (II Timothy 3:15).

Application and conclusion.

We are in possession of the most remarkable and miraculous Book ever written.

66 different books of all kinds, history, poetry, prophecy, gospels, letters, revelations.

40 authors of different cultures, backgrounds, education.

1600 years in 3 languages, Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic

Written on two continents, Europe and Asia

Written in different locations: wilderness, dungeon, palace, prison, in exile, at home

Written by men from all occupations: kings, peasants, doctors, fishermen, tax collectors, scholars, etc.

Written in different times: war, peace, poverty, prosperity, freedom and slavery

Written in different moods: heights of joy to the depths of despair

Written in complete harmonious agreement on a widely diverse range of subjects and doctrines

Written with clarity, simplicity, heavenly beauty, divine majesty.

Furthermore we must note its fulfilled prophecy, its miraculous preservation, its world wide reception, its historical and archeological collaboration and especially the powerful transformation of lives, communities, nations where Word has been preached.

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

Romans 15:4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

II Timothy 3:14-17 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

You have been given a great gift. Treasure it and treasure it up in your heart. Read the Word of God. Memorize the Word of God. Take every opportunity to hear it taught and preached. Above all love the Word of God.