

**Class Objectives** – After this class you will be able to:

- Discuss how the New Testament canon came to be viewed in the early Christian church with the same respect as the Old Testament canon.

**Key Terms:**

- Fulfill
- Eusebius
- *Muratorian Canon*
- Chiliasm
- Expanding Core

## **Canon and New Testament Theology (cont.)**

### **I. Devotional:**

A. Matthew 1:22-23; 2:5-6, 15, 17-18; 5:17

1. use of OT

2. use of “fulfill”

B. Practical Application

### **II. Early Church Canonical Lists (cont.):**

A. *Muratorian Canon*

Eusebius, *Church History* iii.25

Athanasius 39<sup>th</sup> Festal Letter (A.D. 367)

Canon of Synod of Hippo Regius (A.D. 393) & Canon of Third Synod of Carthage (A.D. 397)

1.

**Eusebius, *Church History* iii.25**

At this point it seems reasonable to summarize the writings of the New Testament which have been quoted.

In the first place should be put the holy tetrad of the Gospels. To them follows the writing of the Acts of the Apostles. After this should be reckoned the Epistles of Paul. Following them the Epistle of John called the first, and in the same way should be recognized the Epistle of Peter. In addition to these should be put, if it seem desirable, the Revelation of John, the arguments concerning which we will expound at the proper time. These belong to the Recognized Books.

Of the Disputed Books which are nevertheless known to most are the Epistle called of James, that of Jude, the second Epistle of Peter, and the so-called second and third Epistles of John which may be the work of the evangelist or of some other with the same name.

Among the books which are not genuine must be reckoned the Acts of Paul, the work entitled the Shepherd, the Apocalypse of Peter, and in addition to them the letter called of Barnabas and the so-called Teaching of the Apostles. And in addition, as I said, the Revelation of John, if this view prevail. For, as I said, some reject it, but others count it among the Recognized Books. Some have also counted the Gospel according to the Hebrews in which those of the Hebrews who have accepted Christ take a special pleasure.

These would all belong to the disputed books, but we have nevertheless been obliged to make a list of them, distinguishing between those writings which, according to the tradition of the Church, are true, genuine, and recognized, and those which differ from them in that they are not canonical but disputed, yet nevertheless are known to most of the writers of the Church, in order that we might know them and the writings which are put forward by heretics under the name of the apostles containing gospels such as those of Peter, and Thomas, and Matthias, and some others besides, or Acts such as those of Andrew and John and the other apostles. To none of these has any who belonged to the succession of the orthodox ever thought it right to refer in his writings. Moreover, the type of phraseology differs from apostolic style, and the opinion and tendency of their contents is widely dissonant from true orthodoxy and clearly shows that they are the forgeries of heretics. They ought, therefore, to be reckoned not even among spurious books but shunned as altogether wicked and impious.

2.

***Muratorian Canon***

*Translated by:* Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 305-307. Paragraphing has been added by me. Numbers indicate line numeration from Latin text (missing numbers also omitted in Metzger). Brackets indicate clarifying remarks, parentheses indicate alternative translation possibilities.

...at which nevertheless he was present, and so he placed [them in his narrative]. (2) The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke. (3) Luke, the well-known physician, after the ascension of Christ, (4-5) when Paul had taken him with him as one zealous for the law, (6) composed it in his own name, according to [the general] belief. Yet he himself had not (7) seen the Lord in the flesh; and therefore, as he was able to ascertain events, (8) so indeed he begins to tell the story from the birth of John.

(9) The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, [one] of the disciples. (10) To his fellow disciples and bishops, who had been urging him [to write], (11) he said, 'Fast with me from today for three days, and what (12) will be revealed to each one (13) let us tell it to one another.' In the same night it was revealed (14) to Andrew, [one] of the apostles, (15-16) that John should write down all things in his own name while all of them should review it.

And so, though various (17) elements may be taught in the individual books of the Gospels, (18) nevertheless this makes no difference to the faith of believers, since by the one sovereign Spirit all things (20) have been declared in all [the Gospels]: concerning the (21) nativity, concerning the passion, concerning the resurrection, (22) concerning life with his disciples, (23) and concerning his twofold coming; (24) the first in lowliness when he was despised, which has taken place, (25) the second glorious in royal power, (26) which is still in the future.

What (27) marvel is it, then, if John so consistently (28) mentions these particular points also in his Epistles, (29) saying about himself: 'What we have seen with our eyes (30) and heard with our ears and our hands (31) have handled, these things we have written to you'? (32) For in this way he professes [himself] to be not only an eye-witness and hearer, (33) but also a writer of all the marvelous deeds of the Lord, in their order.

(34) Moreover, the acts of all the apostles (35) were written in one book. For 'most excellent Theophilus' Luke compiled (36) the individual events that took place in his presence — (37) as he plainly shows by omitting the martyrdom of Peter (38) as well as the departure of Paul from the city [of Rome] (39) when he journeyed to Spain.

As for the Epistles of (40-1) Paul, they themselves make clear to those desiring to understand, which ones [they are], from what place, or for what reason they were sent. (42) First of all, to the Corinthians, prohibiting their heretical schisms; (43) next, to the Galatians, against circumcision; (44-6) then to the Romans he wrote at length, explaining the order (or, plan) of the Scriptures, and also that Christ is their principle (or, main theme). It is necessary (47) for us to discuss these one by one, since the blessed (48) apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor (49-50) John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: to the Corinthians (51) first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third, (52) to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth, (53) to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans (54-5) seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition, (56-7), yet it is clearly recognizable that there is one Church spread throughout the whole extent of the earth. For John also in the (58) Apocalypse, though he writes to seven churches, (59-60) nevertheless speaks to all. [Paul also wrote] out of affection and love one to Philemon, one to Titus, and two to Timothy; and these are held sacred (62-3) in the esteem of the Church catholic for the regulation of ecclesiastical discipline. There is current also [an epistle] to (64) the Laodiceans, [and] another to the Alexandrians [both] forged in Paul's (65) name to [further] the heresy of Marcion, and several others (66) which cannot be received into the catholic church (67) — for it is not fitting that gall be mixed with honey.

(68) Moreover, the Epistle of Jude and two of the above-mentioned (or, bearing the name of) John are counted (or, used) in the catholic [Church]; and the [the book of] Wisdom, (70) written by the friends of Solomon in his honour. (71) We receive only the apocalypses of John and Peter, (72) though some of us are not willing that the latter be read in church. (73) But Hermas wrote the *Shepherd* (74) very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, (75) while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair (76) of the church of the city of Rome. (77) And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but (78) it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among (79) the prophets, whose number is complete, or among (80) the apostles, for it is after [their] time. (81) But we accept nothing whatever of Arsinous or Valentinus or Miltiades, (82) who also composed (83) a new book of psalms for Marcion (84-5) together with Basilides, the Asian founder of the Cataphrygians...

### III. How to Conceive of the Canon:

1. An Expanded Core
2. The Most Debatable Book
3. Possible Other Contenders?
4. The Process of Recognition and the Locus of Authority
5. Redemptive History and the NT Canon

**IV. Questions for Consideration:**

1. Would you say that the canon was “determined” by the early church or “recognized” by the early church? Why?
2. What key points arise from the passage on New Testament canon in Eusebius’ *Church History*?
3. How does the notion of an “expanding core” help us in our understanding of the historical development of the New Testament canon?

**V. Recommended Reading:**

1. Bruce, F. F. *The Canon of Scripture*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.
2. Metzger, Bruce M. *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1997.
3. Ridderbos, Herman. *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*. Translated by H. De Jongste. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1988.