

## Introduction

*Lord, Your Word is a light to our feet, a lamp to our feet, a light to our path. It is through keeping Your Word that we are warned about the path of sin, that we are guided in the path of righteousness. O Lord, I pray that in this class we would have the sense that You are guiding us through Your Word to Your truth to Yourself. I ask, Lord, that the size of this class would not get in the way of getting to know one another and having our questions asked. I ask, Lord, that whether we are engaged in careful reading of Your Word or in big questions about life, whether engaged in personal edification or training ourselves for the guidance of the church that we would have the sense that we are in your presence even while we are about our academic business. O Lord, we commit this day and every day to You. We pray through Christ, Amen.*

In a word, what I want to accomplish is to help you master the occasions, the backgrounds, the concerns of the books we study, which are Hebrews and Revelation. As a bonus we are going to cover the pastoral epistles, I and II Timothy and Titus, as time permits, at the end of the class. The other course that is like this, New Testament Survey, generally does not get to the pastoral epistles. We want to get a feel for those books and, above all, to get a sense of the unique contribution that the books Hebrews, James, Peter, I John, and Revelation make to the Christian faith, to our belief, to our life, and to the canon as Christians.

Today I will introduce the course, the textbooks, the social world in the New Testament, and the book of Hebrews. Throughout the course you will have opportunities to write reflection essays before each class, according to the topics in the course guide. This is so you come to class having thought about something very significant; ideally it makes the class better because you have given some serious thought to it in advance.

There are three books for this course. One book is *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment*, the first one you will read. Then there is one on the book of Revelation, and one on the book of James. You are not going to read every page of these, because I want you to focus on reading the Bible. I want you to read the Bible well and slowly. I want you to read Hebrews to Revelation very carefully. Maybe you can read them twice and read them slowly and very carefully.

Let's start our class. Let me just give you a big picture, an overview of what I want to do in this class. I would like to help you see what the unique contribution of the books Hebrews, James, I Peter, I John and Revelation are to the Christian faith and to the Christian life. If you look at Christian theology, Christian thought, and the way people quote the Bible, the Gospels and the letters of Paul have a certain pride of place. They dominate our consciousness as Christians. One scholar put it this way: "Christianity today is, broadly speaking, the Christianity of St. Paul or of Paul the Apostle." That is true and I might not even say that that is wrong, but I would like to broaden our horizons so that we see Hebrews, James, Revelation as books that provide us other perspectives on the faith that we believe and that we live out. That is the broad purpose of the course. Hebrews alone shows us the high priestly ministry of Christ. The book of James presents Jesus as the Lord of our ethical life, giving commands in a way that Paul's letters never quite do. Peter describes the relationship between Israel and the church and holds out Jesus as an example to believers as no particular passage in Paul ever does. The book of John warns us so clearly about the danger of schism or divisions in the church and warns us to be discerning of the spirit of apostasy. The book of Revelation has a splendid vision, the supreme vision of spiritual warfare and the power of Christ in defeating Satan. These things may be found in the Gospels or in the books of Paul, but Hebrews—Revelation develop them with a power, clarity, and depth that is unparalleled. I

want us to get an eye for the unique message of each book of the New Testament. That is my goal for the course.

Most of the church functions with a sort of a canon within the canon. The canon within the canon are the books we love, read, think about and meditate upon the most. They include the Gospels, the letters of Paul, the Book of Acts, Genesis, Psalms, and Isaiah. You may have and other people may have a favorite book.

Then there are books that are sort of in the outer darkness, books like the minor prophets. When was the last time you heard a sermon on Nahum or Obadiah? In the New Testament, books like Jude and II and III John get very, very little attention. I will even confess to you they are not going to get a lot of attention in this class. We ignore these books and they function as something like orphans, as wanderers. What we need to have as a goal, then, is to hear the distinctive contribution that each book of the New Testament makes to our canon.

As Christians, we tend to divide the New Testament up as Gospels and the epistles of Paul, and then the rest. Again Paul's letters have a certain "pride of place." Why? Well, for one thing, he wrote a lot. He wrote 13 books. He wrote very systematic books like Romans and Ephesians. He wrote books like I Corinthians and Philippians that answer a lot of questions that people have. Paul seems to have been systematic and so he lends himself to systematic theologians. Those are some reasons why Paul has a "pride of place," but again we want to hear the distinctive voice of the various books Hebrews to Revelation. So let us see how we can describe these books a bit.

First of all, we could look at these books, Hebrews to Revelation, as catholic epistles. Now by catholic epistles, I do not mean books written by Catholics or books that Catholics really like and that Protestants wonder about sometimes. A catholic epistle is one that is written to the entire church. To whom was the book of Romans written? It was written to the church at Rome. How about I Corinthians, to whom was that written? It was written to the church at Corinth. Galatians was written to a series of churches in a certain region. But if you look at our books, they do not say they were written to a church in a particular place. Look at James 1:1 and I Peter 1:1-2, Jude 1, and so on. James 1:1 says "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the 12 tribes scattered among the nations." Now who is that written for? It is for all Jews who are believers throughout the world, not to any particular group. I Peter says "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect strangers in the world scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, who have been chosen by the foreknowledge of God the Father to the sanctifying work of the Spirit" and so on. So to whom is Peter writing? To a group of Roman provinces that cover a vast domain, not a particular church in one place.

Next we have II Peter 1:1 which reads, "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as our own." Who is he writing to? To all Christians, anybody who has received this precious faith. The book of Jude, which follows III John, begins, "Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, the brother of James, to those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ." To whom does Jude write? He writes to all Christians who have been called, to all who are loved. So we call these catholic epistles. They tend not to be as focused on a particular local internal circumstance. They are something that is of interest to the entire church, not limited to local situations.

Secondly, we could describe these books as pastoral books. By pastoral books, I mean that they are functioning to lead the church into the truth, perhaps in difficult times. Hebrews clearly is a pastoral book. The author is a leader of the church, most likely the church in Rome around the year 68 A.D. He

is not able to be with them. He writes them a letter, which is the sermon that he would preach if he were there to tell them how to persevere in times of persecution. The letters of John are full of pastoral language. John says things like “my brothers,” “my dear brothers,” “my beloved children,” “my dear children.” He is constantly using terms of endearment with this group of people who are facing a schism, a great division in their church. He regards them as his children. James looks like a pastoral work in various ways. It seems to be addressing the danger that many people, many Jewish Christians, have of resting too much in knowledge and so he warns them or chastises them to bring them to a lived faith. It has a pastoral feeling.

Several books on this list are showing their opposition to heresy. Jude, II Peter and I John are deeply concerned with the corrosive effects of heresy on the life of the church. A couple of them are sermons. Hebrews says it is a sermon, in 13:22. He says “bear with this word of exhortation,” which is just a word for a sermon. I Peter and James feel like maybe they were sermons at one point.

These books also harken back to the Gospels in certain ways. The Gospels are filled with references to discipleship, to obeying the words of Christ, to the kingdom. The word ‘kingdom’ appears in the letters of Paul and in the book of Acts, but it goes from appearing well over 100 times in the Gospels, to about 15 or 20 times in all the letters of Paul. In the books of Paul, the kingdom, the reign, the power, and the glory of Christ are constantly referenced and function as the voice of Christ, the King, the Lord who commands His church. So in some ways, these books harken back to the Gospels.

These are some of the traits of these books. Let me ask how many of you went to a secular university and college? How many of you are in a secular situation right now, working in a secular workplace or a secular school right now? One of the questions that people ask in a setting like that is, “How can we know what is true?” Different generations will ask different questions. Young adults often ask, “What and who can I trust?” In a secular university, this is a fundamental question among the many options and ideas of what truth is, among the many proposals for a trustworthy source. A Christian would say that the Bible is the source of truth, but often that answer will not be accepted by a secular audience. One question people may ask is, “What makes you so sure that the Bible is the Word of God, is true and reliable, and that the events that are purported to have happened actually occurred?” A second question is, “Where did you get this book, these 66 books and no others, from?” Someone who is fairly knowledgeable may say that the books that we have, the 27 books of the New Testament, are not listed anywhere in the New Testament itself, and were never really fully agreed upon until the earth fifth century. In fact, the first time you get a list of these 27 and no others is in a letter by a man named Athanasius who was under a false suspicion of being a heretic for half of his life and that was in the year 367 A.D. The first time a church council lists these 27 and no others with no debate is in the year 397 A.D. at the Council of Carthage.

This is a foundational issue, upon which many of us are challenged or will be, if we are doing our job and staying in contact with unbelievers. If you spend all your time with Christians, then you will not have this problem, but I am hoping that you do not spend all your time with Christians and that you will need to give an account for why you quote these books as authoritative. I will even imagine a scenario for a moment with you. Imagine that you are on a state university, on a secular campus and you are the speaker at a debate. Imagine that you are the Protestant representative there on that particular day. There is an atheist, a Jew, a Roman Catholic, a liberal Protestant and then there is you. You are the conservative Protestant and you are going through your reasoning and maybe talking with the fellow Christians. To your surprise you are finding yourself quoting Revelation and Hebrews and James and I Peter repeatedly. After a while, the liberal Protestant turns on you because he was expecting these things. He was expecting you to spend all your time in the Gospel of John, and the book of Romans. He

says, “Why do you keep quoting Hebrews and Jude and Peter and Revelation? These books really do not belong in the New Testament canon. They were not written by eye witnesses of the ministry of Jesus, and they were doubted for centuries by the early church. What makes you treasure these books?” Now let us suppose he says, “The first time the 27 are listed was by Athanasius in the year 367 A.D. in his Easter letter. The first council to say these are the 27 is the Council of Carthage in 397 A.D. and furthermore, the New Testament church, the Christian church has usually ignored many of these books. They have a deuterocanonical status. They are not the books we really use. They were not voted in until 450 A.D., and even now nobody pays much attention to them anyway. Let us just get back to John and to Romans.”

You are stunned, but your Roman Catholic friend rises to your defense, saying, “Sir, many of your criticisms are indeed valid, but your objections only serve to enhance the Catholic perspective. God ordained the teaching office of the church to guide the church through matters such as these. It would indeed be difficult to prove the canonicity of II Peter and Revelation to an objective audience and everything you say about the slow recognition of the church is true. However, the Lord has guided the church through history. The Spirit works slowly and He has blessed the teaching office, the bishops, and the cardinals of the church are led and inspired by the Lord. And so the voice of Christ, the voice of God continues through this day through the living voice of Christ in the bishops of the church.”

At this point you are thinking, “With friends like this, who needs enemies?” Would you know how to answer these questions? What would you say if you were asked why you choose and read these books and no other? What are the typical answers people give for saying these are our books? What would they say? What would you say? Or what would an ordinary fairly unlettered Christian say? “Tradition.” What do you mean tradition? Tradition is what we were always taught, it is what we always believed, it is what the church has always said. So you would say, “One reason why we know that Hebrews counts is because it sounds kind of like Paul’s letters, or James is kind of like the Gospel. There is a coherence of all 27 books.” That is fair. And what else would an ordinary person say? “God is sovereign and surely He would guide His church. He would not let a book that we need fail to make it to us, right?”

That is a good, solid bad answer. People often say, “It means a lot to me,” or “The Lord speaks to me through those books,” or “I just hear the Lord’s voice.” All these are good bad answers. “I can understand those books. I may not understand the theologians but I can understand these things.” People also often say, “God said it, that settles it,” or “If it was good enough for my grandmother, it is good enough for me.” Can we do better than that? Let me go back to one or two of these that run together. “It means a lot to me, and the Lord speaks to me through them.” Those answers are really so subjective that they almost cut off any discussion, and the other person will respond, “Well, I read them and they do not mean a lot to me, so that is the end of that.” You really get nowhere that way.

A slightly more sophisticated reasoning is, “These are the books that the church has always had, and it is what we have always been taught.” This is still basing everything on experience in the final analysis. What they are saying is, “It is the accumulative experience of the church.” That is to say, it is the experience of many generations of Christians, which is the more Catholic position of “this is the way the church has always done it.” Essentially, it is saying, “Really wise people chose for us, and it does not matter when they chose, but people chose.”

Let me put it to you a different way. If somebody says, “I know these books are the 27, they are the inspired Word of God, because God blesses me, God saved me, God is edifying me and speaking to me through these books.” The hard question that I would ask them is, “What else have you read from that period of time? You want to say those books are the ones that edify you? Have you ever read the epistle

of Barnabas? Have you read the Shepherd of Hermas? Have you read the letters of Ignatius and Clement?" All of these were written in the first century A.D. How many of you have read the letter of Ignatius to the Corinthians or Shepherd of Hermas or the epistle of Barnabas? Very few of us have. How can you say "these are the 27 because God speaks to me" when you have never read any others? Has God spoken to you through the books of C.S. Lewis or John Stott or J.I. Packer? Have you been moved and edified by books like that? I hope you would even be moved or edified by the books you read here at the seminary, maybe even the books you read in this course. I have taught classes and people have been converted not by reading the Bible, but reading the assigned textbooks. What makes it so that C.S. Lewis and John Stott and J.I. Packer are not inspired when people are edified? So you see, we need to have better answers than "it means a lot to me, it's always been taught that way, it benefits me, it brings me to faith" and statements of that nature. We need better answers, and the answers ideally should come from the Bible itself.

Let me explain for a little bit some approaches to where we get the books that we have. First, some questions that people raise about the 27 books do have some validity. There are real questions, solid questions that deserve answers about where we get our Bible and especially the books we are talking about here. For example, we really do not know who wrote some of these books. Nobody knows who wrote Hebrews. Somebody may have guessed right, but nobody knows. I, II and III John do not say who wrote them. They say he is an elder and there are various clues that lead us to the apostle John, but he never says, "I, John, one of the 12, the apostle of Christ, writes to you." Also the author of Revelation is simply "John." It does not say which person specifically. Maybe there are several Johns and everybody kind of thinks it is the apostle John, but it is never said certainly.

Then some of the books have run into trouble in the early church because they are so short, and they are small. They deal with small themes like Jude and II Peter, which really spend almost all their effort on refuting heresy as do II and III John as well. A couple of the books are known to be written by non-apostles. Hebrews 2:3 makes it clear that he was not around for the earthly ministry of Christ or at least his congregation was not. He seems to put himself with them in 2:3. He says in 2:2, "For if the message spoken by angels was binding and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation which was first announced by the Lord was confirmed to us by those who heard him." Do you see that key phrase? It was announced by the Lord. It was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. What did it just imply? That he did not hear Him. Somebody else had to confirm to him what it was all about. So Hebrews was apparently written by a second-generation Christian.

And then we have Jude and James, which appear to have been written by the brothers of Christ, but the brothers of Christ mocked Him during His own life. At one point, they said to Him, "Hey, Jesus, going down to the festival? Going down to Passover? Going to show the people Your stuff, Jesus? Show them Your tricks, go ahead." That is in John 7 where His own brothers appear to almost taunt Him.

One other thing is that it is true that the church did have some debates about some of these books, like Hebrews. People were troubled for a long time by the idea that they were not quite sure who wrote it. A lot of people thought it was Paul, and some people argued that it should be accepted because although we are not sure it was Paul, other people say it does not really matter. It has the stamp of truth and it has been used by the church. Some people were afraid of Revelation because of the wildness of the imagery. Some people became very enthusiastic about the 1000-year reign of Christ and it seems to have been abused by some people early on (this was called "chiliasm"), so those books were questioned for a while.

What, then, can we actually say to the question, “Where do we get these books?” First of all, we want to say that the Roman Catholic Church is, by and large, untroubled by this question. They say and believe that the history of the church is good enough. What the church has said through its bishops over the years is okay, even if it took 500 years, because there are a lot of things that take time. It took a long time for the church to realize (so they would say) that Mary was perpetually a virgin and that the Pope never makes any mistakes when he speaks from his throne. So canonicity took a while, but that is all right; the Lord slowly leads into the truth. Protestants, of course, cannot be satisfied with that. They know that this, like many other Catholic statements, would be nice if it were true. Would not it be great if we had bishops and whenever we could not decide something we just said, “Take 100 years, think about it, and get back to us, and when you are done the church will have the truth and can be done with our disputes.” It would be great if we could be done with debates on baptism so easily. It would be appealing. The problem is that the facts do not seem to bear out that hope. Specifically, the Roman Catholic bishops and the Popes have said some things that are terrible. Some are entirely contrary to the Gospel, to the truth, to good Christian living and to a sound hope. So we might like it, but we cannot have it.

Protestants have to have something more solid and they want something that comes from the Bible. However, Protestants got off to a false start. When Protestantism first came on to the scene, immediately Catholics saw that Protestants would have to answer this question, so they asked Luther. Luther basically answered the question of, “Where do you get these books?” by saying, “The canon is whatever preaches and urges Christ; whatever urges and preaches Christ is the canon.” Now do you know where that led Luther? He was very critical of the book of James because James does not have any reference to the cross of Christ. It does not have any reference to His death, His resurrection, His atonement, or the justification by faith in Christ. Now I still think it belongs, but Luther said “therefore this is an epistle of straw.” He made various other disparaging remarks about James, and about Jude and Revelation as well because they too did not, in his view, have a sufficiently forceful or clear presentation of Christ’s sacrifice, the atonement and the call to faith through the atonement. You might say that Luther advocated a Christocentric canon as opposed to a theocentric canon. He wanted not just God to be present, but he wanted Christ to be presented in a certain way and various Lutherans have followed him in this. They have said things like, “The canon is whatever witnesses to Christ so as to elicit faith,” and, “The canon is whatever permits itself to be preached and heard as the living voice of Christ.” Now tell me, what is wrong with that? Where can that go wrong? How can that be subjective?

The danger of subjectivity is people hearing and getting their own spiritual direction. It is also a danger if the canon is only what is preachable and hearable. What would happen then? People would start preaching what they wanted to hear, and the canon would change every generation because some things would work better in one generation than another. The worse case scenario would be that the church would deafen itself to what it needs the most and that the preachers and teachers would capitulate to that decision. In a sense, the canon corrects our deaf and blind spots. I will quote a friend of mine who said, “If you want to know what Christ is saying to the church today, look at the parts of your Bible that are not underlined.” There is a lot of truth in that. Why is it that we have some favorite passages? Maybe it is because it answers our favorite questions and we need to let God ask questions we do not like. So it is very dangerous to have a subjective test or something like a Christocentric canon. What we need is a canon that comes from the Bible itself.

Now some other people have tried to do that and they have come up with a different approach. I will call it the ‘empirical quest for the canon’ or the ‘historical quest for canonicity.’ The hero of this approach would be F.F. Bruce, who wrote a wonderful book called *The Canon of Scripture*. Bruce Metzger has also written about the canon of Scripture in his books, *The Canon of the New Testament*, and *The Text of*

*the New Testament*. They are believing men, who are scholars, and who look empirically at the history of the church and at the New Testament. They come up with answers like this. What is canonical is, first, what is apostolic. That is to say it has to be written by an apostle and it is what is ancient. It is written back near the time of the events at hand and it is what the church has always used. It is a public use of a book that was read aloud in worship from the beginning even when Bibles or books were outrageously expensive. Sometimes they would add things like catholicity in there with public use. It does not say it is what the church everywhere has used so there may be a place where perhaps the Shepherd of Hermas was read and loved, but that was only in a few places, whereas the other books were read everywhere and loved and revered everywhere. Sometimes, they would add different categories, such as inspiration of the Spirit.

Now that is a pretty good list. The problem with it is that each one has a flaw. For example, apostolicity. If you looked at the 27 books of the New Testament, only eight of them were written by one of the 12. There are 13 letters by Paul; he might have seen a little bit of the life of Christ, but he was not one of the 12. He says so very plainly. James, Jude, Mark, Luke and the book of Acts are all written by non-apostles. So counting heads does not seem to work very well.

What about the criterion of antiquity, written near the time of the events? That sounds good, but of course, there is a problem. The problem is Luke 1:1 says “many have undertaken to write an account of the things we witnessed” so the fact that the book is old does not mean it is good. In fact, Luke seems to be interested in correcting books or accounts of the life of Christ that have weaknesses. As far as public use, Didache and Hermas were read publicly sometimes and there were places where Revelation and II Peter and Jude were not and they even deliberately were not used. So that does not seem to solve that problem.

What I want to tell you is that those criteria—apostolicity, antiquity, public use, catholicity—are useful, but they are not the core of what determines that a book is canonical. What people often choose as the mark of a book being canonical is its self-attestation. Self-attestation is basically the idea that the Bible cannot be proven to be the Word of God by something outside itself because if it can, then that authority is more final or more ultimate. Let me use an illustration for a moment. If I am going to make a difficult, rare, or questionable point in a lecture, what is it likely that I will do? I will quote somebody. Why do I quote somebody? Who will I quote? Will I quote my neighbor who is a construction worker? No, I will quote an expert and then I will say, “You see, I am not the only person who believes this; there are other reputable people who believe this.” In fact, if you are writing something questionable in a term paper, what do you do? You give your source, write a footnote, right? Every time you do that, you are saying, “Do not trust me; trust someone who is superior to me.” But the Bible cannot do that, so there is certainly a point at which it is absolutely right to say the New Testament, and the Old Testament for the matter, has to be self-attesting because it cannot appeal to anything but itself.

The danger is that if you simply say that these books of the New Testament are the ones that we should trust as canon because they are self-attesting, it cuts off conversation in a hurry. Now remember, we are back in a secular university. Why should I trust that these are the books that I should trust? We want to look deeper than simply to say “I know these are the books because they say they are the books.” In fact, self-attestation can go bad another way. It can seem like you are saying “I know they are the books because I have heard a little voice inside me that said they are the books.” They say they are, therefore they are. And, of course, they do say they are. It is true that the 27 do have things in them like “thus says the Lord” and the apostles do say things like “this is the law I laid down in all the churches.” They just stand on their own authority and they expect their books to be read. They say things like, “Blessed is he who reads the words of this book,” Revelation 1:3. So they do claim that the Bible claims to be the

authoritative Word of God. In a sense that is our foundation, but in another sense we have to have more so that we can debate or discuss with people who may not want to hear, or may not be convinced.

What can we say about where we get the New Testament books beyond the concept of the self-attestation of Scripture? All reasoning is finally circular, but you want the biggest circle you can possibly get. The Bible is God's Word. How do you know? Saying, "Because it says so and it is God's Word and God's Word is true; therefore, it is God's Word," is a really small circle. That does not leave a lot of room for discussion with non-Christians. There is room to say however, that the Bible claims to be the Word of God and there are 700 pieces of evidence that support that. Anybody can discuss those and they all draw us to a certain conclusion. You want a really big circle that allows lots of debate and public discussion, so that is what we want to do when we talk about the canon.

What I want to do is look at the way that the Bible talks about itself and the idea that the self-attestation of the Scripture is good, but we also need to go a little bit farther. What we want to do is look at the source of the canon to present the biblical case, but also to draw in as much as we can from other lines of reasoning. For example, Luther says, "The canon is what preaches Christ truly." There is a lot of truth to that. First, this idea includes orthodoxy, so for a book to be accepted into the canon, it should cohere or agree with the other books, it should be orthodox. Second, the canon is what the church has always accepted and that entails antiquity. There are certain books that have always been used. The idea of inspiration is implicit in the idea of the self-attesting character of Scripture, but we need a little bit more than that, we need something deeper. Let us start off with the basic truth that the idea of a canon appears already in the New Testament itself. The idea of a canon is biblical and this fact is found throughout the New Testament.

I want you turn with me to II Peter 3:16. There is a crucial verse there that is easy to overlook because the point that we are interested in right now is a subordinate clause. It is just a little side remark, easy to miss. Peter states in verses 15 and 16, "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking of them in these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand which ignorant and unstable people distort as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."

Did you hear the key phrase? "The other Scriptures." When he says, "As they do the other Scriptures" (some translations say, "As they do the rest of Scriptures"), what did he just say about Paul? He says that what Paul is writing is Scripture and it is not even Peter's main point! He is assuming that he and his writers agree and his readers agree that Paul writes inspired literature. If it was debated, he would defend it and explain it and give three reasons, but it is just assumed that everything that Paul writes is canonical.

Now there is another one I would like you to turn to and that is found in I Timothy 5:18, which is talking about how pastors should be paid. "For the Scripture says about paying those who preach and teach, 'Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.'" Now if you have a Bible with marginal references, where does "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading the grain" come from? It comes from the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy. Where does "The worker deserves his wages" come from? It comes from Luke. Now what did he call that at the beginning of the verse? He called it "the Scripture says." Therefore when Paul writes I Timothy, and the date is almost certainly at the very end of Paul's life, around the year 67-68 A.D., he is already quoting Luke as Scripture. So the original objection that these books were not recognized until the year 300 or 400 A.D. is not so. They were recognized immediately in an offhand way. It is assumed that these things are the Scripture, that which is written on par with the Old Testament Scriptures. In I Corinthians 14:37, Paul says, "This is the rule I laid down in all the churches." The rule about church order. Some books of the New Testament

also anathematize or curse any teaching that does not cohere with their teaching. In Galatians 1:8-9 Paul says, “Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preach to you, let him be eternally condemned. As we have already said so now I say again, if anybody is preaching to a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned.” Now when he says this, he is assuming that his words are the standard. Anything else leads to damnation and is in fact damnable and damned. And those who preach are in that condition. So Paul is assuming that his writing is the canon, is the test of truth.

We also have I John 4, which has warnings about the spirit of the anti-Christ that has already come into the world. When you call somebody ‘anti-Christ’ today, we think of the beasts and dragons and the mark 666. But John says, no, the spirit of the anti-Christ is already in the world; anybody who denies our message is in the most literal sense, anti-Christ. If you deny that Christ came in the flesh, that He gave an atoning sacrifice (the other things that John teaches), you are anti-Christ. You see that the act of saying those sorts of things—“if you disagree with me, it is damnable and it is anti-Christ”—is assuming that what they say is authoritative. It is canon. And the word ‘canon’ means the rule of faith and light. They know that what they are writing is the rule. So the concept of canon does not come 400 years later.

Think also of the way in which Jesus spoke. When Jesus gave His commands, for example, on the Sermon on the Mount, so very often He said, “Truly I say to you,” or in the Gospel of John, “Truly, truly I say to you.” About 35 times He says, “Truly, truly I say to you.” He also says, “You have heard that it was said, but I say to you.” Now what is He doing when He does that? He is equating His words with the Old Testament, even saying, “You misconstrued the Old Testament. I will tell you what it really means. I am a definitive interpreter and My word stands.” This gets back to the question of, when you want to make a point, if you are not full of authority, where do you go? You go to some other scholar or expert, but Jesus does not do that. He never says, “And you know I am telling you the truth because there was this teacher I had who said so.” Or, “There is this really great book I read last week and it said so too.” He never says that. Now He does indeed quote Scripture occasionally to prove that what He is saying is consistent with the rest of the Bible, but it confirms what He has to say or corroborates it. It does not demonstrate His source of authority; it proves of His authority.

Furthermore, consider the very idea that Jesus chose apostles. Why did Jesus choose apostles? Matthew 10, Matthew 28 and Acts 1 say that Jesus called them to be with Him and to be His witnesses. They are there to testify to the word and the work of Christ. The church needs to have someone who will remember what Jesus says, and understand what He did, and understand what it all signifies. We would say then that Christ established a formal authority structure to be the standard and the source for all future preaching. I just quoted a book by Herman Ridderbos, *Redemptive History in the New Testament Scriptures*. The description of where we get the New Testament in this book is by far the best I have ever read. If you want to investigate the canon from a biblical perspective, this is the book of books. Acts 10:41 says the apostles were chosen to be eyewitnesses. One of the proofs of that is that when the twelfth apostle, Judas, came to an end, who did they choose or what was the criteria for their replacement? They had to be there from the beginning, had to be an eye witness, had to not only have seen it, but had been with them to interpret. It is not just seeing it, but understanding it, the two things go together. Let me just illustrate that for a moment. You remember back in high school, I will say it from a male perspective, and a beautiful girl comes up to you and makes it very clear that if you would ask, she would go out with you this weekend. She is obviously interested, but you are thinking, “She is way too good for me.” You can take that a couple ways. You can think, “Maybe I have a higher social standing than I thought,” or it could be that she just broke up with her boyfriend because she is really angry and is just going out with you to make him mad and get his attention. You have to understand not just the event of her flirting with you, but also the interpretation of the event. She is not really interested. She just

wants to provoke her boyfriend, that is all. So you need the interpretation, not just the event. That is what the apostles had.

Jesus then called and trained 12 men to see, to hear, to remember, to teach, to understand, and what they got as a consequence is called tradition. This is a different use of the word ‘tradition,’ but it is used a number of times in the New Testament. Tradition here means the distilled, fixed essence of the apostolic proclamation of Christ. Not a social tradition, but rather a body of teaching that has been carefully phrased, carefully preserved, even memorized and passed down to reliable people who will guard it just the same.

I want to show you some other passages in the Bible that have this idea. In I Thessalonians 2, the idea is that there is a body of teaching that is to be preserved, taught, guarded and received by the church. Verse 13, “We thank God continually because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us...” Do you hear what he just did? He said that he was the oracle for the Word of God. “When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” So his word is the Word of God. Then down in verse 14, “For you, brothers, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea which are in Christ Jesus. You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus Christ and the prophets and also drove us out. They displeased God and are hostile to all men in their efforts to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so they would be saved.” So he is putting Jesus and the prophets and us all at the same level. He has a sense of his own authority.

Romans 6:17 is another verse that talks about the tradition and the idea of handing things down. The NIV translation obscures this point. It says, “Thanks be to God that although you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching.” Now that phrase, “form of teaching” is that same word ‘tradition.’ “You wholeheartedly obeyed the tradition to which you were entrusted.” Did you hear that? You wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching, the tradition, to which you were entrusted. You were entrusted to it. It is like a living thing. I Corinthians 11:2 says, “I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings just as I passed them down to you or passed them on to you.” Even notice the little thing about the Lord’s Supper in verse 23 of the same chapter, where Paul says, “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you.” That is all the same idea. There is this body of doctrine given by Jesus to the apostles that should be carefully guarded and handed to you and it is authoritative. It is actually the content of the faith.

Jude verse 3 is another indicator that this is not just in Paul, but it is found elsewhere. Jude verse 3, “Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.” This idea of handing down the words of Christ and handing down a summary of what Jesus did, His miracles, and the doctrine that He taught and what all the apostles agreed upon, had been around from Pentecost onward. “That teaching,” “that oral teaching that was guarded,” “to which you are entrusted”—that kind of language was the foundation of the church. It gave birth to the church. The church recognized the written works, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, the books of Romans, Hebrews, James, and Peter. They recognized them instantaneously as canon, as the written record of what they had already believed and what had been entrusted to them. They were guarding it. It had been established as the definitive content of the faith. Contrary to the hypothetical Catholic friend I was talking about earlier and the liberal Protestant, the truth is that the Gospels, the letters of Paul, Acts and some of the other books (I Peter, I John) were always received instantaneously as canon.

The first manuscript, the earliest manuscript and every manuscript that has ever been found, the earliest copies, 200 A.D., 250, 225 A.D. and onward, always have all four Gospels and no other Gospel. There is no handwritten copy in existence of the New Testament from the first centuries that have another Gospel, like the Gospel of Peter, which is one that exists and circulated and people rejected. You do not have a compilation of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the Gospel of Peter anywhere. Rather, you have always have those four and only those four. You also always have the letters of Paul—all 13 of his letters, nothing else. You always have Acts, as well as I Peter and I John. Yes, it is true that some people do not have II and III John and so forth. Yes, it is true that sometimes Hebrews is put last with a little asterisk because they do not know who wrote it and that scared some people. That is true in some early copies, but the bulk of the New Testament was instantaneously, always, accepted everywhere because it is the written record of the teaching by which they had already been saved. It is a written record of what they had always heard, always been taught, so there was not any debate about it.

Some people, especially Catholics, say that the church chose or created the canon or they will say that the canon is the product of the church. I would say that is exactly backwards. The church is the product of the canon. The canon, meaning the rule of the faith, existed in oral form for some decades until the New Testament was written. When it was written, people said, “This is it; now we have a written record.” As the apostles started to die and the first generation started to leave, there was no longer a living voice. They were gone, but their record remained. The church is the product of the canon. What they had always been carefully taught was used to judge the books that came to them.