

Class Objective: To reaffirm, renew and expand the believer's understanding of and confidence in the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Class Overview

1. Clarify the role of the Bible in evangelical Christianity
2. Understand the factors that make the study of the Bible's reliability a critical necessity
3. Address the charge of circular reasoning in defending the integrity of Scripture
4. Remember that conversion is not primarily a product of logic but a work of the Spirit
5. Identify common attempts to discredit Scripture
6. Explore alleged contradictions in the Bible
7. Examine the formation of the Bible
8. Describe the history and importance of the copying of the Bible
9. Consider the principles and place of interpretation of Scripture
10. Explain the purpose and value of translations of Scripture
11. Reflect on the ultimate confirmation of the Bible's truthfulness
12. Delineate the practical implications of believing the Bible is trustworthy

Notes

V. How was the Bible formed?

A. A few important terms: (taken from William Mounce, *Why I Trust the Bible*)

1. Canon - refers to a rule, the standard by which something is judged to be true or false. In biblical terms, canon refers to the books that Christians accept as authoritative. We have an Old Testament canon and a New Testament canon.
2. Canonization - is the process by which the church recognized which books were authoritative and therefore belonged in the New Testament.
3. The Old Testament Apocrypha - are the books (such as 1 Maccabees and 2 Esdras) that are not accepted by Protestants as part of the Old Testament but are accepted by Roman Catholics. These books are sometimes called "the deuterocanonals."
4. The New Testament Apocrypha - are the books not accepted by the church as part of the New Testament, such as the Gospel of Thomas.
5. The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament Pseudepigrapha - are catch all phrases for the writings that were not accepted as authoritative by mainstream Judaism or Christianity. Many, if not most, of these claimed to be written by people who never wrote them, hence the title "pseudepigrapha," or "false writings."

B. Old Testament

1. Throughout the Old Testament are references to words from God being recorded and preserved beginning with the Ten Commandments (Deut. 10:5). These words were to be guarded from alteration (Deut. 12:32). Often, those in the office of prophet, recorded words from God (1 Sam. 10:25; 1 Chron. 29:29; 2 Chron. 20:34; cf. 1 Kings 16:7; 2 Chron. 26:22; 2 Chron. 32:32; Jer. 30:2).

- a) Given the chronological indicators of the Old Testament, after about 435 B.C. there were no further additions to the Old Testament canon.
- b) Jewish rabbis and the Jewish historian, Josephus (born A.D. 37), both attest to a recognized and completed Old Testament canon even though they knew of other apocryphal literature in the first century.
- c) In A.D. 170 Melito, bishop of Sardis, mentions all 39 books of the Old Testament (with the exception of Esther) but mentions no apocryphal book as canonical.
- d) Historian, Eusebius (A.D. 260-340), quotes Origen (A.D. 185-253) as listing most present Old Testament books as canonical but none of the apocryphal books.
- e) “It was not until 1546, at the Council of Trent, that the Roman Catholic Church officially declared the Apocrypha to be part of the canon (with the exception of 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh). It is significant that the Council of Trent was the response of the Roman Catholic Church to the teachings of Martin Luther and the rapidly spreading Protestant Reformation, and the books of the Apocrypha contain support for the Catholic teaching of prayers for the dead and justification by faith plus works, not by faith alone.” Wayne Grudem
- f) Old Testament scholar, E.J. Young summarizes the liabilities of the apocryphal books: “There are no marks in these books which would attest a divine origin ... both Judith and Tobit contain historical, chronological and geographical errors. The books justify falsehood and deception and make salvation to depend upon works of merit ... Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon inculcate a morality based upon expediency. Wisdom teaches the creation of the world out of pre-existent matter (Wisd. 11:17). Ecclesiasticus teaches that the giving of alms makes atonement for sin (Eccl. 3:30). In Baruch it is said that God hears the prayers of the dead (Bar. 3:4), and in I Maccabees there are historical and geographical errors.”
- g) Grudem further notes, “Thus the writings of the Apocrypha should not be regarded as part of Scripture:
- (1) They do not claim for themselves the same kind of authority as the Old Testament writings.
 - (2) They were not regarded as God’s words by the Jewish people from whom they originated.
 - (3) They were not considered to be Scripture by Jesus or the New Testament authors.
 - (4) They contain teachings inconsistent with the rest of the Bible.”

C. New Testament

1. It has often been erroneously asserted that Constantine (A.D. 274-337), in connection with the council of Nicaea, was responsible for determining the books that were accepted into the New Testament canon.
 - a) A more accurate understanding is presented by Mounce. “Neither Emperor Constantine nor the Council of Nicaea determined the canon-the twenty-seven books we accept as the authoritative New Testament. Constantine called the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 because he was concerned about a group within the church called the Arians and the possible split they could cause in his kingdom. The Arians were followers of a man named Arius, who taught that Jesus was not fully God. Church leaders from around the world were called to Constantinople-both those representing the long-held, traditional belief that Jesus was fully God and fully human, and those representing the Arian position (including Arius himself). As far as the historical evidence shows, neither Constantine nor his mother played any role in the debates. They exerted no influence over the canon at this gathering, nor was the canon something Constantine was even considering. His concern was political unity.”
 - b) Even the agnostic scholar, Bart Ehrman, concedes, “. . . emperor Constantine had nothing to do with the formation of the canon of scripture: he did not choose which books to include or exclude, and he did not order the destruction of the Gospels that were left out of the canon.”
2. Circumstances that made the establishment of the New Testament canon necessary.
 - a) The death of the Apostles and eyewitnesses.
 - (1) It is primarily the Apostles who are given the ability from the Holy Spirit to recall accurately the words and deeds of Jesus and to interpret them rightly for subsequent generations (John 14:26; 16:13, 14). The Apostles understood they taught with Christ’s authority (1 Cor. 14:37; 7:10-12; Gal. 1:1; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Peter 3:12; Rev. 1:1, 2).
 - (2) The absence of the Apostles along with the passing of eyewitnesses who could corroborate the accuracy of the stories and sayings of Jesus made an accepted written record needful.
 - b) The emergence of false writings and teaching required an accepted canon to distinguish the real from the fake.
 - (1) Paul himself, acknowledges that there were letters being circulated under his name falsely (2 Thess. 2:1, 2).

- (2) Several of the New Testament letters address aspects of false teaching that were troubling the churches.
3. Criteria used by the church to recognize authenticity
- a) Note that the church-at-large (the church in all geographic areas) did not authorize the books of the New Testament but, in the providence of God through the work of the Holy Spirit, recognized the inherent authority with which the Holy Spirit had already endowed these books.
- b) J. I. Packer observed, “The church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity . . . Newton did not create gravity but recognized it.”
- c) Three criteria appear to have been used by the church to determine which books had divine authority.
- (1) Apostolicity
- (a) If it was confirmed that an Apostle wrote a book it was considered to have been part of the canon.
- (b) If the known, close associate of an Apostle, like Luke, wrote the book or books, they were eventually accepted as authentic.
- (c) The book of Hebrews, whose author is unknown, was therefore slower in being accepted as was 2 Peter since the grammar and style of the Greek is so different from 1 Peter thus raising initial concerns regarding its authorship.
- (d) The significance of this criteria of apostolicity is seen in the essentially unquestioned acceptance of 21 of the 27 books of the New Testament. (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Paul's thirteen epistles, 1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation)
- (2) Orthodoxy
- (a) A second criterion considered whether or not a given book reflected correct teaching, that is, teaching consistent with other books that had been recognized as authentic. Mounce notes,
- (i) “Fortunately, ever since the mid-60s the church had all of Paul's writings (32,471 words in today's Greek text) and probably the gospel of Mark (11,314 words). These fourteen books contain 43,785 of the total 138,213 words in our New Testament canon and provided a strong basis on which to judge other writings as

orthodox or unorthodox. If the gospel of Luke (19,497) was written before Acts, and since Acts (18,472) ends before Paul's trial, these two books were also part of the core of the canon by the 70s. These sixteen books contain 81,754 of the total 138,213 words in our canon, or 59 percent. Matthew would add another 18,365 words (72 percent). . . . plenty of teaching existed by which to judge whether or not other writings were orthodox.”

(ii) This criterion slowed the acceptance of James since his teaching on justification initially seemed to contradict Paul.

(iii) As well, a canon refined by this consideration protected the church from two second-century heretical movements known as Marcionism and Gnosticism.

(3) Cathoicity

(a) A third criterion evaluated a book based on its usage in the church as a whole. (The word catholic means universal or all-inclusive and is to be distinguished from Roman Catholic.)

(b) The requirement of widespread usage of these writings indicates that their acceptance was not done secretly or in isolation nor by any political entity.

(c) Since New Testament books would have circulated independently, this process was both time-consuming and complicated.

(i) Among the ways this can be measured is to see what books were included in the lists of canonical books over a wide range of dates and locations.

(ii) The number and range of church fathers quoting Scripture provides additional data regarding the breadth of acceptance of canonical writings.

4. Eusebius's (A.D. 260-339) categories of canonical and noncanonical writings provide a useful overview of writings the church assessed and its conclusions.

a) Undisputed

(1) This includes twenty-one of the New Testament's twenty-seven books.

(2) “. . . there was never any real question about twenty-one of the twenty-seven books and letters [of the New Testament]. To state this another way, out of the 7,968 verses in the Greek New Testament, the authority of 7,417 verses [93%] was never seriously debated.” Mounce

b) Disputed

(1) Disputed books were those regarding which some had reservations for various reasons. They were not necessarily disputed by Eusebius.

(2) Eusebius includes James, Jude, 2 Peter, and 3 John.

c) Spurious

(1) These represent books or writings that were theologically orthodox but noncanonical.

d) Heretical

(1) Heretical books are writings that are not orthodox and therefore not canonical and should not be read. Included in his list are, the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas, of Matthias, the Acts of Andrew and John and the other apostles.