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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Basic Bible Doctrine

"How We Got Our Bible, part I: Canon"

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we turn to Thee with thanksgiving for the Lord Jesus Christ and for the blessings that are ours as a result of the atoning work accomplished for us so many years ago. We thank Thee for the Scriptures that so plainly reveal that he is the penal substitute who has borne the penalty for us, and we rejoice that heaven has no longer anything that it may bring against us who have, by the grace of God, been brought to trust in him because the debt has been paid. And so we worship Thee, and we praise Thee for that, for the assurance that we have of everlasting life.

And Lord, we pray that Thou wilt enable us to please Thee in our daily lives. Enable us to be a good witness for our Lord Jesus Christ, and bring across our path many who are the objects of the spirits work of efficacious grace, and if it pleases Thee, may we be used in the salvation of souls. May our minds be open tonight and clear, and may we respond to the things that are set forth in the word of God and then in the history of the early church concerning the canon, the books that we call the Bible. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight is the first of two messages which are very closely related under the general title of, "How We Got Our Bible." And tonight we're dealing with the

canon, and next week we will be dealing with the next of the subjects. So, "How We Got Our Bible, the Canon," and for Scripture reading I want to turn to Acts chapter 20 and read verses 17 through 35. Now this passage does not have to do with the canon very directly, but it does have some things to say that raise the question of the canon. So let's read this as our Scripture reading, and then we turn to our subject, "How We Got Our Bible, the Canon." The apostle is addressing the Ephesian elders who have been called in order to listen to him, and Luke writes in the 17th verse of Acts chapter 20,

"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the LORD with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and trials, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shown you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Except that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I testify unto you this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

Now you know he has said that he has not held back anything that was profitable unto them. One might ask the question, "What is profitable for believers?" And some people would answer it, "Well to go through the Bible and select the sweet things, the

lovely little things, and avoid those difficult doctrines, like the Doctrine of Election, or the Doctrine of Propitiation, or the Doctrine of Reconciliation, or the Doctrine of the Kingdom of God and the Millennial Kingdom. But you will see that the apostle explained what was profitable by saying, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God," "All the counsel of God." All the Bible is profitable.

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. And of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, for the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace," (Now that word is what is profitable, and it is all the counsel of God.) "Which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. (He sent out no prayer letters with return self addressed envelopes.) "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. (I not only took care of myself, but I took care of others who were with me.) I have shown you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Now a question might arise from reading these verses, and it's a very important question. Well Paul, you declared, "All the counsel of God." You said you spoke, "the word of his grace." What is "all the counsel of God?" What is "the word of his grace?" And if someone were to say, "Well, it's the Bible, the sixty-six books of the

Bible." We might reply, "Well, how do we know that these sixty-six books that we call the Bible represent "all the counsel of God?" How can we be sure that these books that have been collected represent the divine word of God? That brings us to our subject, "How We Got Our Bible." But when we think of how we got our Bible that brings us to two related topics: one, the canon and its history, and the other, the text and its history. And next week, we shall look at the text if we finish the canon tonight. But tonight we want to deal with the canon.

Now, the canon is spelled with one "n," although it too is a very powerful subject. It is not the same as the canon that you fire. The term canon is derived from an Old Testament word and a New Testament word which are related to one another. It is the Hebrew word *qaneh*, which might be spelled q-a-n-e-h if you were trying to transliterate it, and the Greek word *kanon*. Now the word *qaneh* and the word *kanon* originally meant a reed, r double e d, and from that came the designation, or meaning, measuring rod because a reed was used in ancient times to measure, so that the word canon is derived from the word reed, which meant a measuring rod, or a rule.

Now, there are different meanings of the term canon, historically, and for the sake of time, I will not try to deal with them. Let's say this, that the term canon is commonly used among Christians to refer to the list of books referred to as Scripture. In other words, when we say the word canon, we ordinarily mean the sixty-six books of the Bible. These are the books that represent the word of God. They are the standard by which we judge truth. So the term canon, then, refers to the list of books that we refer to as Scripture, or the sixty-six books of the Bible.

There are two ways that a person might define canon. He might define the canon as an authoritative collection of writings, but if he defined it as an authoritative collection of writings, he would have to say, and would likely say, that the authority rested in the church. An authoritative collection of writings, that is the position of the Roman Catholic church. The canon is an authoritative collection of writings. It is

authoritative because the church has determined that the Bible is authoritative. Speaking to Roman Catholic theologians, they will frequently say, "The Bible has been given us by the church," and so, consequently, we should speak of it as being an authoritative canon because the church stands behind it. The church is the authoritative body. The canon is authoritative because it has been given by the church.

Protestants have been inclined to speak of the canon as a collection of authoritative writings. Now we're not saying the same thing. An authoritative collection of writings is the Roman Catholic position with authoritative resting in the church. Protestants say the sixty-six books are a collection of authoritative writings. They are authoritative because they are self authenticating. That is, they're authority is in themselves, given those Scriptures by the Lord God and brought to us through inspiration. The church does not determine the canon.

As a matter of fact, the truth of the canon, the truth contained in the canon is the truth that has brought the church into existence by virtue of new birth. So, while it's true the canon was recognized as sixty-six inspired books later than the existence of the church, the church has come into existence through the truth that is enshrined in the canon. So the church is the product of the canon. The canon is not the product of the church. The church is the product of the teaching of the apostles. It's the product of the teaching of the prophets. It's the product of the divine teaching. Later the completed canon came to be recognized as the sixty-six books that we know them today. But the church is the product of the canon. The church does not determine the canon. The church merely recognizes the canon. So when we think of the church and the canon we should think of the church as the body that recognizes the canon.

These two viewpoints are reflected in the words that John MacKay, a Scot, who was at one time President of Princeton Theological Seminary, these two viewpoints are represented in his words. He said, "Where Christ is, there is the church." That's the Evangelical view. The Roman Catholic view is, "Where the church is, there is Christ," and

those two viewpoints represent the viewpoint of the Protestants and the Roman Catholics. In this case, it's my own personal opinion that the Protestants are correct. The church does not determine the canon. The church merely recognized the books of the Bible which have their authority by virtue of divine inspiration. Every book of the Bible was authoritative the moment that it was written. It may have taken some time for the church to recognize various books as being authoritative, but they were authoritative. Our recognition may have taken, in some cases, several centuries, but in most cases, the authoritative was recognized almost immediately. There's been a great deal of neglect of the subject of the canon leading to a great deal of misunderstanding.

Let me give you one illustration of misunderstanding. Professor Vernon McCasland was Professor of Religion at the University of Virginia. In reviewing a book in one of the leading scholarly journals a few years back, Professor McCasland said this concerning the canon, "I think also that several of the creeds have as much, if not more, authority than the canonical books themselves." And then he wrote again in that same review, "It is difficult to see how one could understand the theology of even a Reinhold Niebuhr, but more especially a Paul Tillich, if one knew only the biblical canon. And who would wish to silence such a Christian theologian as Tillich." Now he wrote that before Tillich's life became public knowledge, and it turned out he was not quite the saint that the liberal scholars had thought that he was. As a matter of fact, he was quite the philanderer through most of his life, and everybody's a little embarrassed that they quoted him so much in the Protestant church. You can see that this represents, on the part of a supposedly knowledgeable professor, a grievous misunderstanding of the nature of the canon.

When we talk about the canon, we're talking about the unique sixty-six books of the Bible. It's a very important subject. If the truth is found in a book, as evangelicals believe, then the men of one book ought to know the limits of their authoritative literature. Now the early church had to know which books were canonical because they

used the books of the Bible in order to talk with and attempt to refute the heretics of their day. And furthermore, they had even a more practical reason for knowing which of the books were the inspired books of the word of God because in the last imperial persecution when the authorities would knock on the door and ask them, "Do you have any books of the Bible?" Well then, they would, of course, have to know which ones of those books they wanted to defend with their life, and those that they didn't mind handing over to the authorities. So they had to know the difference between the Shepherd of Hermas, for example, or Second Clement, First Clement, and then the books of the New Testament. They had to know the difference so when the authorities knocked on the door, they would say, "O you want the sacred books, well here's the Shepherd of Hermas. I'm sorry I have to lose it. You can go and burn that one." In the meantime, they would keep Romans back hidden under the bed or under the cushion of the sofa in the living room. So they had to practically know which books were the important books.

Now let's turn to our subject, and I want to, tonight, kind of go through this as rapidly as I can, at least to try to give you some idea of how we have come to understand that our Bible is composed of sixty-six authoritative books. The periods of the history of the canon may be distinguished in this three-fold way. First of all, from 70 A.D. to 170 A.D., and incidentally, that date 170 A.D., is the date of one of the fathers by the name of Hegesippus, and I put that in parenthesis after that capital "A" in the outline. This one hundred years after the writing of most of the New Testament was a period of time in which the books of the Bible circulated separately. That is, there was not an immediate collection of the books of the Bible, although there is some evidence in the later part of the first century that certain books were being collected. There was a collection of Pauline writings, but we do not know how many of them were in that collection by the end of the first century. Peter in 2 Peter chapter 3 refers to Paul's writings, and he knows about them, but how many of them he knew, we do not know. So this period of time,

this one hundred years, was a period of time in which the books circulated separately and a gradual collection was being made of them.

There were many influences that led to the collection of the canonical books. Let me just list some of those without going into much detail. There was, of course, the pattern of the Old Testament canon. The New Testament believers knew of the Old Testament Scriptures, and so they knew that there was a collection of writings that had been brought together and were recognized as the authoritative word of God. And so that very fact led them to think, ultimately, about a New Testament collection of writings, or the New Testament canon. The public worship of the churches patterned after that of the synagogue was another force that led to the collection of the books of the New Testament as well. In the early stages of the churches' history, the letters of the apostles would be read. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 the apostle refers to the reading of his letters in an assembly. In Colossians chapter 4 he exhorts the Colossians to read that letter and to read another letter too, which was the letter from the Laodiceans. In the 1st chapter of the Book of Revelation, reference is made there to the reading of the word of God in the public assembly. Paul tells Timothy, "Give attention to reading," and the context of 1 Timothy 4 indicates that it is probably public reading in the local church. So the public worship of the church led, naturally, to thoughts concerning the collection of the books into a canon.

The circulation of the writings of the apostolic fathers and the apologists, who wove into their words, words from holy Scripture and words from the earlier apostolic writings led to the collection of the New Testament writings as well. The persecution of the churches, tended to force decisions concerning the value of books, as I mentioned to you just a moment ago. Controversies over biblical doctrine, and there were controversies even in New Testament times, led to the collection of writings because they wanted to settle issues, and so they would collect the volumes, or the books, in order to discuss and decide what view is heretical and what is not. And then later on the introduction of the

book form aided them in the collection of the writings of the New Testament into a book. So there were a number of influences that led to the collection of the writings, but the first hundred years of the existence of the Christian church was largely a time of separate circulation of the individual books and their gradual collection into a canon.

The next period of time from 170 A.D. to 303 A.D., the latter date is the date of Diocletian, is a period of time that is probably best characterized as the period of time in which the Ecclesiastical literature is separated from the canonical literature. Now, what is meant by that is this, there were many books that circulated that were very useful to the early church. I made reference a moment ago to the Shepherd of Hermas. Now that is a very good book, but it's not canonical. There is the first epistle of Clement, and also another which is probably not the second epistle of Clement, but nevertheless, has been given that title, the letters of Ignatius. Many other writings hovered on the edge of the canon for a time. They were discussed by the early church. Some people regarded them as being inspired. But ultimately, the Christian church, guided by the Holy Spirit, weeded out those things. That took some time. So from 170 A.D. to 303 A.D. those pieces of literature that were useful to the early church were finally separated from the canonical, which came to be regarded as having a higher standing. So that period of time is characterized, then, by that separation of the canonical from the Ecclesiastical.

Then from 303 A.D. to 397 A.D., in that period of time, almost one hundred years also, we have the formal ratification of the current belief of the Christian church by the authority of councils. Now, in principle, the authority of the books was established early, and in principle, the idea of inspired New Testament books to go with the Old Testament books was settled early, but the exact extent of the total canon did not come to its conclusion until about the beginning of the fourth century, or rather around 397 A.D. This date, incidentally, 397 A.D., is the date of the Third Council of Carthage, and it is in this particular council that reference was specifically made to the canon of Scripture and a

list of books is given, and that list of books given is the sixty-six books that we recognize as the inspired canon of holy Scripture.

So by 397 A.D. the church had reached a final conclusion concerning all of the books of what we know as the canon. I say the canon was fixed in principle early, and this debate was only over a minor number of books. But there was a debate over those books for a considerable period of time. For example, there is no clear indication that 2 Peter was regarded universally as being inspired and canonical until about the 3rd Century, but as you can see 2 Peter is a small book, and it was understandable perhaps that that small book, which has a limited circulation, was not known as widely by the local church as say Romans or one of the gospels.

Let's turn now to the leading features of the history of the canon, and we want to deal first with the Old Testament canon and then with the New Testament canon. In the history of the Old Testament canon, there are the following landmarks, and I'll just mention these, and try to say a word about them. The first of the landmarks is the testimony of our Lord. Now the Lord Jesus, in words that he speaks, makes it very plain that he recognized the authority of the Old Testament. Turn with me, if you will, to Luke chapter 11 and verse 51 for one of the verses, Luke chapter 11 and verse 51. In this verse the Lord Jesus is speaking and he says in verse 50, "That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel."

Now where in the Bible is Abel referred to? Well everyone knows that that is the Book of Genesis. "Unto the blood of Zacharias," now this is not the Zechariah who authored the Book of Zechariah. This is the blood of Zacharias who, "Perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation." That Zacharias is referred to in 2 Chronicles chapter 24, 2 Chronicles. Now that's an interesting statement of the Lord because he says, "That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation;

From the blood of Abel," in the Book of Genesis, to the blood of Zacharias in the Book of 2 Chronicles.

Now, of course, we know from our English Bible the last book of the Old Testament as the book of Malachi. But the order of books among the Hebrews is not the same as the order of books in our English Bible. In the Hebrew Bible, the last book of the Bible is 2 Chronicles, and the 24th chapter is near the end of that particular book. So the Lord Jesus, when he speaks about, "the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world," from Abel to Zacharias gives us an indication that he regarded the beginning of the word of God as the Book of Genesis and the conclusion of the word of God as 2 Chronicles, and the thirty-nine books, the thirty-seven other books are found between those two in the Hebrew Bible. So this is our Lord's way of saying that he recognized all of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament as canonical, citing from the first book and from the last book of the Old Testament.

And in Luke chapter 24 and verse 44, there is another reference that is of some significance. This is the passage in which the Lord Jesus is speaking with reference to the Emmaus disciples and then after that he speaks to them in the 44th verse and said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me." Now, the Law of Moses is a reference to the Torah, or the Pentateuch, then the prophets, the reference is to the greater prophets and the lesser prophets, and then the reference to the Psalms is in that part of the Old Testament known as the writings, the third of the sections of the Old Testament. The Old Testament was divided into three parts, the law, the writings, and the prophets. And here he refers to all three of those divisions. So from these and other references, it seems clear that the Lord Jesus recognized what we know today as the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament as authoritative.

Now we must remember this, that when books are indispensable to the redeemer, and it would appear from these references that all of these books were recognized by the Lord Jesus, and therefore thought by him indispensable, they must also be indispensable to the redeemed. So they were indispensable to the redeemer, they are indispensable to the redeemed. From the testimony of the Lord, we may conclude that he recognized the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament as authoritative and the word of God.

Now the second of the landmarks is the testimony that comes from Jamnia. Now Jamnia is spelled "J-A-M-N-I-A," sometimes also Jabneh. That is a village, or a town on the Palestinian coast, Jamnia. From 70 A.D. to 100 A.D. at Jamnia, the Rabbis discussed the limits of the canon, among other things, and during this period of time, they fixed the limits of the Hebrew canon. And at the end of the 1st Century, the limits of the Hebrew canon were fixed by the Rabbis. Now there were two forms in which the Old Testament text has come down to us. One, the Palestinian, and in this Palestinian form of the text, there are a lesser number of books. The Alexandrian is the other form of the text that has come down to us. The Alexandrian Jews had a larger canon than the Palestinian Jews. And also, incidentally, there is a different order in these books. It's rather interesting that the church accepted the Hebrew, or Palestinian canon, but the order of books interpretation from the Alexandrian Jewish canon. But, it is clear from what we know of the early church and the Lord Jesus that they accepted the shorter Palestinian canon, and those other additional books that were in the Alexandrian Jewish canon were not recognized by them.

There were three groups of books in the Palestinian canon: the law, the prophets, and the writings. And they are in that order, the law, the prophets, and the writings. And it has often been asked, "Why is the law first? Why are the prophets next? Why are the writings last?" Some have suggested it's the dates of the acceptance of these sections of the Old Testament as the authoritative word of God. Others have said it's the relative value that was placed upon the Law of Moses as over against the prophets and the

writings. That is the Law of Moses, the books of the torah, Genesis, Exodus, so forth, through Deuteronomy, these books were accepted as more authoritative, the prophets next, and the writings last. We're not absolutely certain of that. Jamnia, however, did not form the opinion of the Jewish believers nor of the Christian church, they merely confirmed the opinion that individuals had at that time.

The third testimony, which I'll just mention to you and pass on for the sake of time, is the testimony of Athanasius to the Old Testament canon. He wrote an Easter letter in 367 A.D., and in this Easter letter, he refers to almost all of the books of the Old Testament, with one exception, he omitted Ester. Ester had quite a struggle getting in the canon. You can understand why because the name of God is not found in it. Ester was grouped with useful books, but not with canonical books, but by that time, the books of the Old Testament, as we know them, were largely accepted by both the Jews and the Christians as the authoritative word of God. Jerome, the great Catholic Scholar, who lived in the latter part of 4th and early part of the 5th Century, accepted the Hebrew Bibles canonicity as we know it today.

Now turning to the New Testament canon, the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, there are some landmarks in the study of that as well. We have the testimony of our Lord. Now the Lord does not refer to the twenty-seven books of the New Testament specifically. You remember in the upper room, speaking to the apostles, he says to them that he is going to teach them. He says that the Holy Spirit, when he comes, is going to instruct them. Let me just read you John chapter 14 and verse 26. Here he says, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." So he says the Holy Spirit is going to teach them all things. Then in chapter 16 in verse 13 he says, "Nevertheless when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come." Now this has been called the

pre-authentication of the New Testament by the Lord Jesus. The Old Testament was retrospectively recognized by the Lord Jesus Christ, the New Testament is prospectively accredited by him. He says that the Holy Spirit is going to teach them all things. He's going to instruct them. He's going to show them things to come and included within this is the writing of the apostles. By the way, the Lord Jesus never cites from the apocrypher as Scripture. I'll say something about that in a minute.

Now as far as the testimony of the apostles is concerned, the apostles confirmed the authority of the Old Testament, and they themselves refer to their own writings in measure. But it is clear that the apostles did not, at the time at which they were ministering, have the same conception of a completed New Testament canon that we have today. They recognized that their own words were authoritative. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14 verse 37 in a way that makes it plain he recognized that what he wrote was authoritative. He says a similar type of thing in 1 Corinthians 7:17. In 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16 the reference to, "All Scripture is inspired of God," may include more than the Old Testament because in the 5th chapter of the first epistle he cited from the Gospel of Luke. And so when he says, "All Scripture is inspired by God," since he's called Luke Scripture in the preceding epistle, it may well be that he has not only the Old Testament in mind, but those books of the New Testament that he knew. And then Peter in 2 Peter chapter 3 speaks about the Scriptures, and he includes Paul's writings as being among the Scriptures. So the New Testament apostles were beginning, in their day, to recognize the authority of the apostolic writings and Peter actually put Paul's writings on a par with the writings of the prophets and others of the Old Testament. The New Testament canon came to its conclusion, so far as recognition is concerned, with the Third Council of Carthage in 397 A.D. when the twenty-seven books are listed in that council's decision as being the canon of the New Testament, and they are the twenty-seven books that we have before us today.

Now let me say a few things now about the problems of the canon. Now we look at, just very briefly, some of the things that would interest a person when he thinks about the canon. You might ask the question, "What was it that the early church used as a test to determine what was inspired and what was not inspired?" Well from the divine side, of course, it was the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the saints that led them to those books of the Bible that were inspired. But from the human standpoint, what can we say? One of the most remarkable things about the history of the early church is that they never discuss the theory of the canon, this very important question, they do not discuss at all. It's almost as if they were not concerned at all about how, when, where, and by whom, the canon came to its recognition. They were not concerned about that question. It would be very interesting if we could read some things that they said about it. They simply were guided by the Holy Spirit as they read the books to those that impressed themselves, upon them, as being from the Lord God. But looking at what they say, we can now say that probably these were the things that they used to test the various books that they were reading.

First of all was the principle of apostolicity. Now most of the books of the New Testament were written by the apostles, but not all. Apostolicity means did they have an apostolic origin, even if they were not written by the apostles, are they traceable to the things that the apostles learned from the Lord Jesus, like the Epistle of the Hebrews, for example. The Epistle of the Hebrews was not written by an apostle. But nevertheless, the author of the epistle says that he was taught by those who were taught by the apostles. So the truth that he is setting forth is truth that is traceable to the apostle. Luke was not one of the apostles. He wrote Luke, and he wrote Acts. But Luke was a companion of the Apostle Paul. Consequently, his writings are traceable to the influence of the apostles, apostolicity.

Now that was important because they recognized that the apostleship of the twelve was unique and unrepeatably. They were unrepeatably witnesses to the truth.

That's why there were twelve apostles and that's all. There are no apostles today. There are people that run around claiming to be apostles, but all you have to do is listen to them a little while, and then you know, they are not apostles. They're not even good Bible teachers, much less apostles. Apostolicity was the question that they were particularly interested in.

The second guiding test for them was catholicity. That is, does this particular book represent a book that has had witness born to it by the whole Christian community, a kind of common sense of the faithful, or a general sense of the faithful? Now a book that was recognized only in Armenia, for example, would not commend itself, but a book that was recognized in the east and in the west and in the south and in the north, generally, would have the testimony of catholicity. So the books that were recognized, generally, by the Christian church were the books that gained the recognition as canonical, the witness of the spirit in the total Christian community.

That, incidentally, is why, when the Mormons say that they have some books that are to be classed with Scripture, we're not to pay any attention to it at all. They're claims do not have catholicity. They're only a small group of people who have had an origin in a certain part of the United States, and consequently, they're claim does not have catholicity, doesn't have apostolicity either, for that matter. In fact, it doesn't have anything but the imagination of the founders of that particular group of people.

The last thing which was a specific test was orthodoxy. That is, they looked at the intrinsic content of the books and their spiritual and moral effects. Many writings, incidentally, influence us for good. We all read Christian literature. Christian literature is good. It influences us. We've learned many things from it. Only the Bible, however, invariably transforms life. And so the tests of canonicity were apostolicity, catholicity, and orthodoxy.

Now a person might ask, "Well, is the canon closed? Are the sixty-six books, which we call the canon, are these books all the inspired books? Could not someone

write another book now?" Well, of course, it would not have apostolicity to start with, and for that reason, it would be very difficult for any book to gain a place among the canon. Furthermore, it would have to agree with everything that the apostles have written. Theoretically, it might be theoretically possible for a book to gain general recognition in the Christian church. We don't know of any Scripture that says that is impossible, but I suggest to you there are some reasons why it's unlikely.

First place, Jude speaks about the truth, "Once for all delivered to the saints." Now Jude, unfortunately for us, did not write the last book of the Bible, but he wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and he recognized that there was a body of truth that was once for all delivered to the saints, so it's highly unlikely that another book would be recognized by the Christian church as canonical.

Someone has said, "Well suppose a book that Paul wrote was recovered?" Well if we could discover that it actually was written by the Apostle Paul that still would not mean that it belonged in the canon because Paul wrote other books that were not canonical. The first letter he wrote to the Corinthians has been lost. Our 1st and 2nd Corinthians are really 2nd and 3rd because in his 1st Corinthians epistle he refers to a letter he had already written to them. So it is not simply every book of the apostles. If it's an inspired book, those that were inspired by the Holy Spirit have been collected by the Holy Spirit, we believe in the canon. So Jude at least says that we should think of Scripture as having been once and for all given to us, that body of truth. It's unlikely then that something will be written that should be classed with the apostles, even if I wrote something, it would not be classified with the apostles [Laughter].

One other thing we might say, there is a theological reason why we should expect the canon to be closed. If God desired to reveal his mercy and his justice, well then it's reasonable to believe that divine providence is sufficiently powerful to superintend, not only the writing of the books, as he has done, and the collecting of them in the canon, but also superintend the recognition of the sixty-six, and the sixty-six only, as canonical.

There is a logical reason why the sixty-six are probably the only books that we shall ever recognize as canonical. Those who have the best opportunity to check the books and to decide upon canonicity or recognize the inspiration of Scripture were those early believers who were closest to the scene. And therefore when they recognize the sixty-six, it's very rational to believe that their decision would have a great deal more weight than ours hundreds of years later. No serious effort, incidentally, has ever been made to reinstate books that were once read in the early church and then regarded as ultimately non-canonical and in the Christian church. There has been no serious effort to recognize other books.

Now I know someone might say, "Well what about the apocrypher of the Roman Catholic church?" Well those books, in the first place, were never recognized as canonical by the Roman Catholic church until the 16th Century in the Council of Trent 1546. And so that is not something that the whole of the church has been involved in, and it's a relatively recent phenomenon.

The experiential reason is a final reason why we believe that the sixty-six are the books of the Bible. They have saving and edifying power. Other books do not have saving and edifying power. Now you know in the old days we use to have testimony meetings in the Christian church. Frequently on Sunday night we'd say, "Let's have a testimony time now," and all the women would jump up and speak in the meetings. And so consequently, the churches had to stop that because some of the women took advantage of it. The women are really looking daggers at me now, [Laughter] and I'm just kidding you, I just wanted to see if you were awake. The men and the women would get up, and the same ones would get up week after week, and so finally those testimony meetings got to be nothing but, well I have a friend who calls them bragamonies. And they were just repeating the same things over and over again. But testimony meetings were great things in the history of the church at one particular time.

But one thing you never heard, you never heard anybody get up in a testimony meeting and say, "I thank God that I was saved by Tobit 1:4," [Laughter] or, "I thank God that I was saved by the book of Manasa," or "the second book of Maccabees," or "the book of Esdras," you didn't hear that. You didn't say, "I was saved by the book of Ecclesiastes," or the wisdom of Ben Surak." But you would hear people say, "I was saved through John 3:16," or Roman chapter 5 and verse 1. It is the sixty-six books of the Bible that have the saving and edifying power and the history of the Christian church attests to that.

As far as the apocrapher are concerned, the Lord Jesus never cites from the apocrapher, and the New Testament authors, although they refer to some of the content of the apocrapher books never cite from them as Scripture. They are read in the Church of England's cycle of readings, but they are regarded, even in the Church of England, as simply helpful. And so those thirteen or twelve depending on how you count, twelve books, nine recognized by the Council of Trent are not among the sixty-six books recognized by the Christian church.

Well, I've gone five minutes overtime. I hope you will forgive me. Next week we will look at the text of the New Testament. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do praise Thee and thank Thee for the assurance that we have by virtue of the testimony of the Holy Spirit that the sixty-six books of the Bible are the inspired word of God. We know that in the final analysis, divine testimony is the only reliable testimony. And the Holy Spirit has testified to them in the hearts of the saints who have believed. And we thank Thee for that highest of all testimony, the testimony of God...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]